LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY: A STUDY OF ADULT SECOND-LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN A FURTHER EDUCATION CONTEXT

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE

UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

SEPTEMBER 2000

MICHAEL KENNETH WATTS

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published in any form, including Electronic and the Internet, without the author's prior written consent. All information derived from this thesis must be acknowledged appropriately.

- 8 MAR 2002

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

MICHAEL K. WATTS

The first section of this thesis examines literature published in the areas of language, adult education, linguistics, psychology and second-language learning, in order to investigate the nature of the relationship between language and reality, and the extent to which language can be said to convey meaning. It examines the peculiar situation of the adult learners of languages who, through being effectively deprived of the use of their own mother tongue while trying to express themselves through an imperfectly-acquired second language are deprived also of an aspect of their expressable identity. As the forum for second-language learning is a public one, it goes on to identify certain aspects of the learning group's power to facilitate, and to inhibit, learning.

Against this background, the second section draws upon a series of interviews with forty adult learners of languages, who describe the experience of language-learning throughout its various stages and the effects that this experience has had upon them. It examines the preconceptions, implicit in any language-learning text, concerning the nature and identity of the learner, and emphasises the enormous diversity in life experience that characterises the adult learning group. It details typical aspects of the language-learning experience at beginner's, intermediate and advanced level, and examines the pedagogical implications of the experience as reported by the adult learners.

DECLARATION

No part of the material contained in this thesis has previously been submitted for the award of any degree in this or any other university.

STATEMENT OF COPYRIGHT

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without their prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to thank the following people, all of whom assisted in this project. First and foremost, my supervisor, Professor Ben Knights, whose insights and guidance have been invaluable since the very beginning, and who has continued to give every encouragement even after taking up a new post away from Durham. Special thanks are due to my family: my sons Michael and Andrew, and above all to my wife Lourdes, for her endless support, tolerance and encouragement which have meant so much over the years. New College Durham, who supported and encouraged my professional development. Finally, all those adult students of languages at New College Durham who have, over the years, provided me with such a rich teaching experience. Many of them were kind enough to answer my questions with patience and understanding. Without their invaluable help the study could never have been undertaken.

CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH METHODS

This thesis developed out of my work as a lecturer in Spanish and French at New College, Durham, which is a college of Further and Higher Education. In the course of my work with adult second-language learners, I became ever more intrigued by the problems and challenges that faced them, and determined to find out more about the process of learning a second language as an adult. I resolved to seek information from two sources - the literature and the students themselves. The first section of the thesis is a study of related literature, and the second a study of students of foreign languages who report in interview the subjective aspects of second-language learning that they have experienced. In this way, against a background of second-language learning theory, and of adult education theory, the work chronicles the stages in development of the language-learning process among adults, and the obstacles and challenges that they meet along the way.

The project is an attempt to record the journey undertaken by people who, as adults, learn to use languages other than their own. As in all journeys, the number of possible routes is virtually infinite. Again as in all journeys, the view from a single seat of a constantly shifting landscape is necessarily going to be - in both senses of the word - a partial one. A number of adult learners have been invited, therefore, to share their experiences with me, and their voices will be heard throughout the main body of the thesis.

My research has drawn upon three major sources of information. These are:

1.- the literature that has been published in the areas of language, adult education, second-language learning and, to a lesser extent, cognitive psychology and linguistics. This literature is examined in Section 1 of the thesis, and informs the interviews with adult students detailed in Section 2.

2.- the experience of the second-language learning process as it has been reported to me in recorded interviews with adult learners at four distinct levels of proficiency that I have loosely termed beginner, intermediate, advanced and practitioner. These interviews, and my observations on them, form the framework of Section 2 of the thesis.

3.- 30 years experience as a practising teacher of Spanish, French and English in the UK, Spain, Jamaica and Ecuador, 12 years of which have been in the field of adult second-language learning. It is in the light of these years of experience that I interpret the material set out throughout the study as a whole.

The Literature.

The bibliography will show that the literature I have consulted has been wide-ranging in authorship and date. Many of the views that are held today in the various debates about language are traceable to the ideas of Humboldt, Steiner, Whorf, Sapir, Chomsky, Vygotsky, Bruner and others, and I have had no hesitation in consulting them. They are the bedrock on which much modern thinking rests. This is not to suggest that their age somehow validates their observations, but neither, by the same token, does it invalidate them. Language is a uniquely and a quintessentially human activity, and there is room for many distinct interpretations. It is unlikely that any of them, including my own, will be completely accurate, but I have found them to be useful landmarks in trying to represent the overall realities of normal language use.

In addition to those major landmarks on the linguistic landscape, I have examined the finer detail in certain areas that I found to be of particular interest and relevance to the scope of the project as a whole. Among these are aspects of cognitive psychology, language dysfunction, metaphor and pun, bilingualism, first language acquisition, semiotics and so forth.

Changing the focus yet again, I examined the literature specific to the world of adult education, ageing, second-language learning and group process so as to provide a

detailed theoretical landscape against which the individual experience of adult second-language learning could be examined.

The Interviews.

I have long felt that we ought to treat ordinary people as a major source of information about ordinary people, by drawing upon the all too frequently unrecorded knowledge that human beings have of the way they live their own lives, and of how they cope with and interpret their experiences. I was interested to explore affective aspects of the experience of people who had begun to study a language as adults, and I therefore needed a template which would allow me to be selective in choosing the people whom I interviewed. I decided that, as one of the things that interested me was the degree of difficulty experienced in returning to formal study after a period of time away from it, I should limit my investigations to people who had had a break, however short, from continuous full-time education before beginning their language studies. The people interviewed , therefore, were selected according only to the criterion of age, and I interviewed only one person below the age of 25 at the time when their language studies began, although I saw no reason to impose an upper age limit. On the contrary, several of the interviewees were in their 60's and 70's when the interviews took place and it remains my view that one of the most exciting, challenging and enriching features of Further Education, certainly for the lecturer but ideally for the student also, is the presence in the classroom of people of widely differing ages and life experience.

The interviews were conducted between 1992 and 1998, were tape-recorded and later transcribed. The aim was to obtain sample views of the language-learning process in adults belonging to three distinct categories, and the basic structure for each interview was the same for beginner, intermediate and advanced students in that it followed a script containing the main questions that I wished to ask. This script had been piloted in 1992, and revised and implemented that same year, and was subsequently used as the basis for all the interviews carried out with students at New College Durham. Some of these questions related to statistical information, while others were aimed at understanding the experience that each adult learner had had. Among the information

recorded I included details of the interviewee's sex, age, whether they were right or left-handed, whether they attended daytime or evening classes, how long they had been studying the language, what languages, if any, they had studied in childhood, whether any of their relatives (parents/children) spoke languages, how they would describe their own class and that of their parents, and - a particularly interesting question, in the light of the debate about how language serves not only to interpret but also to construct reality - whether they felt in any way different when they spoke in a language other than English. I was also particularly interested in the role and functions of the group when it comes to easing or aggravating the concerns of its members. The script afforded no more than a very flexible vehicle for exploring the learning experience without omitting too many of the questions I wanted to ask, and in point of fact the shape and duration of the interviews, and the order in which the questions were addressed, varied considerably from one interview to the next. These interviews lasted anywhere from 25 to 50 minutes.

The transcriptions made it possible to seek clarification or confirmation of what was said during the interviews, and also to see whether the feelings and ideas of the interviewees changed in any way as time went by. The first year's interviews recorded a static cross-section of student experience, and obtained the views of a number of people of different experience and at very different levels of linguistic competence. Over the following years, a broader picture has emerged, not only of the flavour of language learning in its various stages but also of the changing experience of those individuals who were first interviewed as beginners, and subsequently re-interviewed as more advanced students.

As the project advanced, it became clear to me that the business of learning another language is never complete, and that many second-language learners do not wish it to be complete. There was room for a further level of investigation beyond what I had arbitrarily termed the advanced student, and that was the experience of the practitioner, which would probably shed some additional light on the language-learning process as a whole. I therefore interviewed a number of language teachers from institutions in different parts of the country, to compare their reflections on the language-learning process with those of my students and with my own. I did so by

sending tapes and a copy of a questionnaire to a number of language teachers, who recorded their answers and returned the tapes to me by post. Again, these interviews were transcribed and quotations from them incorporated into the text of my thesis.

Although the majority of my interviewees have English as their native language, I have been helped in my research by native speakers of French, Italian, German and Spanish. Each interviewee is identified only by a number, corresponding to the sequence of interviews. Quotations from interviews given in languages other than English are in the original language, with my translations as footnotes.

Experience.

The project evolved out of my own experience as a teacher and learner of languages, and the fact that I find communication through language to be fascinating and miraculous. Fascinating because it gives an insight into the individual, both through disclosure and concealment, and miraculous not only because it enables deep thoughts and feelings to be communicated through the distortion of a mouthful of air, but because the entire process seems so delicate, so fragile and so infinitely subject to abuse and confusion that whole enterprise is an unlikely one. For it to happen, a thousand times a day for each of us, is extraordinary. For us not to recognise it as such and to take the whole delicate mystery for granted, seems to me to be wrong, and unwise, and ungrateful. Wonderful though it is that we are able to communicate successfully in our native language, the miracle is compounded for me when we are able to extend our communicative powers beyond their immediate boundaries, beyond even the physical boundaries of nature, culture and politics, and communicate through a second language that we have learned, however imperfectly, to make our own. That fact is wonderful in its own right, but it is accompanied for me by a feeling that exploring the languages of other people somehow enables me to transcend the boundaries of my normal self. When I speak another language I feel different. As much as anything else, this project was inspired by the wish to register and explore that feeling of difference, and to see whether it was common to others or merely a private hallucination of my own.

The three strands that combine in this thesis are necessary to one another. The admittedly eclectic nature of my reading provides a background for the experiences of my interviewees, and one which enables important light to be shed on their testimony. Their observations are thus evidential, not merely anecdotal. They are not isolated from scientific and pedagogical theory, but help to shed light on the implications of such theories for real people in real classrooms. My own experience allows me to interpret what I read and what I am told, and relate it to what I know of the classroom reality. In the process I inevitably interpret things in the light of my own bias and prejudices, but I am not blind to all of these and have tried to show what I believe them to be.

I give particular importance to the need to relate theory to practice, and to allow each to feed off the other. This is so because I am interested in what happens when we behave in a particular way, and am mindful of the observations of Cole et al (1979) who criticised studies based upon imaginary learners who haunt the psychological laboratory but not the 'real' world. I have therefore inclined far more to the concrete rather than to the abstract. My wish to understand the adult second-language learning process a little better is not an abstracted desire. That understanding is necessary in order to enhance the process for the adult learners that I teach, in whatever ways become possible. There are significant pedagogical implications to my research, which are elaborated upon in the final chapter.

As the project has developed in size, so too it has grown more precise in its focus. In addition to the three remaining strands of literature, interview and experience, there were initially to be observations on linguistic development, analysis of psychological tests, particularly diachronic listening tests, and a number of experimental observations which would lend themselves to quantitative analysis. With time it became increasingly clear that my interest lay in the affective, qualitative aspects of the experience of the people with whom I work, and that the quantitative analysis would be a digression. Not only that, but it would probably prove to be of limited value as a contribution to research in general and to this project in particular, and so those plans were abandoned.

The difficulties of dealing with the affective side of experience, however, are manifold. Chief among them is the problem of interpretation, so as to find accountable ways to analyse what people have said and written. The printed page does nothing to convey inflection of the voice, or the twinkle in the eye, or the reduction in speed of utterance as the thinking shifts on to a new and possibly deeper plane. For this reason I have consulted my interviewees about what they have said during our conversations, seeking confirmation that my interpretation is the correct one. I have listened to the recordings of the interviews on numerous occasions, so as to remain sensitive to nuances of inflection and implication, rather than relying exclusively on the written transcripts. Inevitably, on occasion, my interpretation of what was said will fall short of, or go beyond, precisely what was intended. This is in the nature of language, and is one of the reasons for its fascination. I have taken every precaution possible to keep such instances to a minimum.

There is also the fact that experiences differ from person to person, and that even the same event is recalled differently by witnesses whose viewpoint (whether physical, emotional, psychological or whatever) is different. I have no wish to base any kind of conclusion on a single interview or on the experience of a single person. Neither do I want to allow the individual voice to be drowned out by a competing chorus, especially by a chorus of theoreticians. There must be a balance throughout between the theory and the practical experience, and quotations from all sources must be carefully selected and integrated in order to understand some of the complexities inherent in the affective aspects of the language-learning process. I draw attention, therefore, to consensus where I find it, and also to divergence of opinion. It is also crucially important to keep separate difference of experience from difference of opinion. They are not the same, although they may well inform and promote one another.

Any attempt to chart subjective feelings in an area such as this must avoid the temptation of imputing to all students the emotions reported by only one or two. Equally, in areas of high consensus it would be tediously repetitious to quote every interview. I needed to design a system which would allow the words of one interviewee, when they were representative of the general view, to speak on behalf of

the others. To this end, I prepared transcripts of all the interviews that I undertook, and edited all the interviews down into a card index system, which would allow me to compare the observations of all interviewees under a series of headings.

From the beginning, each interview was recorded numerically rather than by name, and as the transcripts became edited down into short quotations under a large number of headings, the words themselves took on their true importance, and the identity of the person who had said them became increasingly dispensable. It was the observation that was of value, not the fact of its having an identifiable source. However, conscious of the danger of misinterpreting what had been said, I created a file in which the interviews were not only numbered but named, so that I could seek later confirmation from the interviewee that my initial interpretation had been correct.

The attempt to produce a longitudinal study of adult language-learners in a Further Education context is complicated by the fact that significant numbers of students drop out after a relatively short exposure to the language. Popular wisdom has it that, as class numbers traditionally decrease at certain identifiable points in the academic year, the students' decision to discontinue their studies is related to those moments on the calendar, rather than to any inherent part of the language learning process. So, if a decrease in numbers coincides with the end of British Summer Time, for instance, it can be blamed on the increased hours of darkness rather than any other factor. The reality is that all students are equally subject to increased hours of darkness, and not all choose to stop attending classes. The end of British Summer Time, poor weather in February, and other external events may well act as triggers which allow the student to take the decision to stop attending classes, but they are clearly not the only factor.

Numerically, the implications of this drop-out rate were that while there were ample numbers of beginners who would agree to be interviewed, and their views on what it was like to be a beginner were naturally invaluable, but many of them disappeared either during the first year of study or at the end of it. The longitudinal nature of the study therefore relied on ever-decreasing numbers of students who kept coming back for more. It is for this reason that certain interviewees appear several times in each of

Chapters 7, 8 and 9, while others put in a brief appearance in the early stages and then are heard no more.

I wished to identify what the process of language use and language learning felt like at different stages - beginner, intermediate, advanced, and practitioner. These labels are of necessity somewhat arbitrary, and do not necessarily have a precise correlation with the amount of time that a given student has been studying a particular language. However, they do correspond to developmental stages in the process, and are no less useful as referential concepts than are the notions of adolescence, maturity, senescence and so forth. There is no suggestion of a strict line of demarcation separating the intermediate student from the advanced, as, among other things, certain idiosyncratic aspects of development in interlanguage serve to blur any possible arbitrary dividing lines, but there are clearly attributes of more and less advanced students which, being once identified, serve to clarify our understanding of the process as a whole.

The overall approach to this work attempts to identify, relate and emphasise certain aspects of the field, specifically the experience of adult language learning as reported by my students and others , and with a particular focus on aspects of personal and group identity and the ways in which they as individuals are affected by the language-learning process. However, my objectives are heuristic - I am trying to explore and describe a feature of adult second-language learning. This is an area which has profound implications for the future of educational provision for adults :

1. languages as a subject area are frequently studied by adults who return to language study after a period away from it, whether motivated by business concerns, simple interest in a language *per se* or in the culture which it in some ways represents and helps to interpret, or the desire to get a little more out of a holiday overseas.

2. the traditional modes of delivery of language courses - which have frequently meant attendance at evening classes, often in a college of Further Education or at the Adult Education department of such universities as still have these departments - have undergone radical changes with the increased growth of distance learning opportunities.

3. a further revolution in the delivery of language learning materials became a possibility with the advent of the Internet, which makes it increasingly apparent that the much-vaunted global village is fast becoming a reality, for good and otherwise. The traditional, provincial approach taken by educational establishments around the world to the enrolment of students is becoming a dangerous anachronism, and the universities and colleges which will survive will be those making intelligent decisions now about how best to capitalise on the distance learning methods of the future.
For these reasons it is of crucial importance to understand as much as possible of the processes that we set in motion in our role as educators, as that understanding may well be expected to have profound pedagogical implications for future systems of delivery.

Control and the organisational process.

At the level of the interviews, I recorded everything on audiotape, without deciding what was significant and what was not, while making every attempt to explore such areas as appeared promising as the interviews unfolded. The pre-existence of a scripted framework to the interviews proved to have been of use as it allowed a measure of informal discussion to take place, on any aspect of the topic that emerged, while still providing an anchor in the form of questions that remained to be addressed.. Again, everything on tape was transcribed, and printed, with no regard for the editorial process. It was only once an interview had been transcribed that concerns emerged as to the amount of weight that should be given to any particular one of the observations that it contained. Any observations which reflected a shared experience reported by other interviewees could, I felt, be allowed to speak on behalf of the others, but there was also the clear need for individual insights to be recorded, whether or not they went beyond what had been commonly expressed and even if they conflicted with generally held opinion.

I was also guided throughout by the feeling that the study should operate at the molecular level, rather than at the atomic. The molecule has all the basic characteristics of the substance as a whole, and it is easy to decompose things too far

for relevant and meaningful study. It was for this reason, again, that the use of a flexible script proved useful, as it allowed interviewees to describe and refer to aspects of their personal experience of delicate and ephemeral feelings and responses, without any attempt to pin them down to a pre-selected choice of vocabulary. In the course of the recorded conversations, a very personalised vocabulary began to emerge as each interviewee found ways of expressing the experiences that they felt to be most relevant to the discussion.

The interviewees: the beginners.

One category of interviewees was composed of adults who were in their first year of language studies at New College, and who were thus learning the language *ab initio*. A broad spectrum was offered in terms of gender, age, class, and prior language-learning experience, as students from evening classes were interviewed, as well as from daytime GCSE classes. The language in both cases was Spanish, which has traditionally been studied far less in local schools than either French or German, and so is likely to attract real beginners rather than false ones. The evening class in question is seen as Year 1 of a two-year course, while the daytime GCSE course runs from September to May. The flavour of the two courses, therefore, their working rhythm, and the extra-linguistic problems that they pose to students who follow them, were substantially different.

From the point of view of motivation, however, both classes contained - at least at the beginning of the academic year - some people who were studying the language because they enjoyed languages, and others who were there despite the fact that they did not especially enjoy them. Almost without exception, the first category was made up of people who reported either that languages were what they were "best at" when at school, or that they were "best at" English, while the second was composed of people who believed themselves to have been "best at" subjects other than English or languages. People in this second category normally had practical reasons for their current involvement in language learning, often studying the language for holiday purposes, and in a number of instances owning or having access to a property in Spain. Typical features of both these *ab initio* categories tended to be:

i) a wide variation in ability and motivation,

ii) a relatively high level of student drop-out in the early stages, and

iii) the subsequent formation of a recognisable group with an identity and ethos of its own.

The interviewees : the intermediate students

The second category of interviewees consisted of people in their second year of language study, for the most part, and who were either in the second year of a two-year evening course leading to GCSE, or had already been successful at GCSE and had gone on to join an A-level course. Student drop-out tended to be much less of a feature at this level than it did at the earlier stage, especially in the first A-level year, in which the students had already passed the milestone of GCSE and had thus had positive feedback on their own ability.

However, there was considerable difference in the type of language use typical of classes at these levels. GCSE language use is essentially behaviourist, and encourages the student to practise language patterns which in the real world would result in the acquisition of an ice-cream, a return ticket to Granada or a double room for three nights. At best, it prepares the student for the communication of facts, as well as for utilitarian transactions. However, the vocabulary is strictly circumscribed by the syllabus, and little or no independent thought needs to be expressed.

First year A-level work, on the other hand, demands another dimension of language use altogether. Gone are the lexical restraints, and the emphasis is much more on the expression of informed thought and opinion, both orally and in writing. Despite the differences in the nature and demands of the task, I am tempted to consider both the second year of a GCSE course and the first year of an A-level course together, if only because they represent the second year in a social interactive process which tends to be marked for the most part by high, though very varied, motivation and a considerable degree of group cohesion.

It is a feature of Further Education, of course, that progression from the first year of a language course to the second and subsequent years does not happen automatically or invariably. Some students choose to repeat the supposed "beginners" level, and a few do so on more than one occasion. Others commonly find that although they have reached the theoretical journey's end, in that they are prepared for the GCSE or A-level examination, they have no wish to do the examination or, having sat it and passed, find that the college is unable to offer them anything suitable to their needs beyond A level. Some students then choose to repeat the two year course, rather than lose touch with the language. This can eventually lead to relatively advanced groups of phenomenally diverse prior knowledge and ability.

The interviewees - the advanced students

Despite the initial intention of following a longitudinal path through the experience of large numbers of students who would progress from beginner to advanced level and record their experiences en route, reality is far more messy and unpredictable. Of all those who were interviewed first as beginners, less then 38% returned to study beyond beginners' level, and of these, 64% went on to recount their experiences at intermediate and advanced levels. However, as this was a foreseeable difficulty, and as the intention was to elicit an approach to understanding the general process rather than its idiosyncratic manifestations, other students who were already at intermediate and advanced levels when the survey began were also interviewed. Once again, in order to identify as much common experience as possible, the interviews were conducted in the light of the same script that had been used in all the other interviews. Interviews were not conducted in batches of students at any given level, but according to a timetable of availability of individual interviewees and interviewer.

The interviewees - the practitioners

I also interviewed a number of teachers of Spanish, of various nationalities, as they provided a view of the language-learning process from the other end of the spectrum, and from a position not frequently considered by other language teachers. These practitioners were subjected to a different script, in that the questions asked of them

were a selection of those used in the general interviews of other language students, and the focus was intended particularly to elicit their views, as successful users of other languages, on the question of identity. A number of very interesting observations had arisen in the earlier interviews regarding the ways in which it felt somehow different to be operating in another language, and I was keen to see whether other practitioners felt, as I had always done, that this was so. They were questioned in 1995, three years after the inception of this project, and their replies showed a remarkable level of agreement on the question of feeling different, as well as shedding much light on other aspects of the language learning process..

The Project

Any given language is a symbolic system for referring to and interpreting certain aspects of reality. At an interpersonal level, language therefore structures, identifies, embodies and transmits belief and culture, whether of the society or of the individual. Through language we arrive at a series of predictive hypotheses, confirmation or rejection of which underlie continued cognitive development. My professional work has to do with demystifying the mechanics of the language in question, so as to make it sufficiently accessible for the student to use. My research, however, has to do with a different aspect of this process, and seeks to understand more about the ways in which second-language learning can and does impinge on the adult learner's notions of identity and their self-concept.

Notions of identity are composed of many strands. Figure 1.1 suggests some of these strands which go towards making up our sense of self: the person each of us thinks of as "I".

Components of a sense of self - Nominative

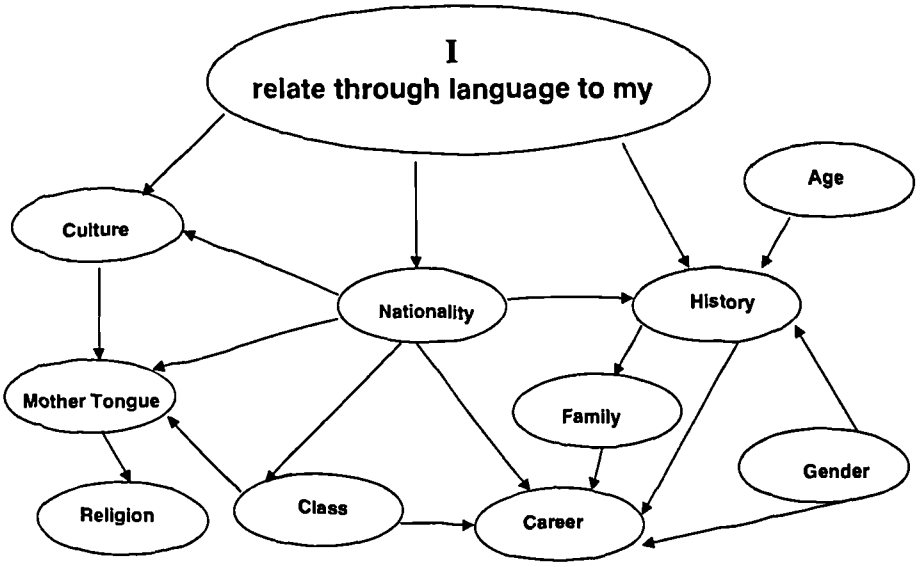


Fig 1.1.

If we now invert this figure, we see that the same factors that have made up the framework of our nominative selves have also served as determining influences in the formation of our selves in the accusative. These influences can be biological (governing our gender and aspects of our physical appearance); cultural (making it more likely that we will grow up speaking one language rather than another); and, within the broader cultural sphere, social (determining among many other things what variant of that language we will use to express our selves.) These aspects of our identity remain external to our selves, laid on us from the outside, even though we might identify very closely with them. Indeed, we talk about 'identifying with' our colleagues, co-religionists, class, and people of our own sex and nationality, although the extent to which we 'identify' with any one group or any member of a group is, of course, highly variable. The implications of deviation from socially-accepted norms in any of these areas can be far-reaching in their effect on our relationship with others, and on the ease or otherwise with which we come to accept our own view of our selves.

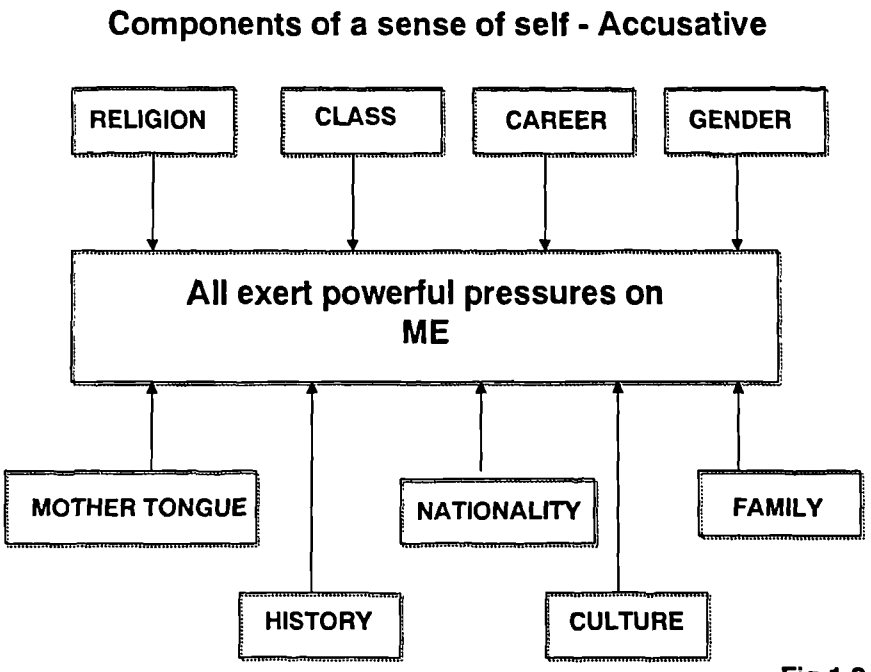


Fig 1.2.

It is part of the generality of human experience to have a sense of identity which can be examined along these lines. This study is about the relationship between people and the languages they speak, and in order to demonstrate how language influences every other aspect of identity, it is enough to add the word ENGLISH to the "Mother tongue" box . It is easy to picture stereotypical members of this identity group.

If we now exchange ENGLISH for another language, which does not have to be particularly exotic - WELSH will do fine - then our image of the typical cultural representative is substantially different. If we go on to substitute JAPANESE for WELSH, all points of reference have changed. I am not arguing for the validity of national stereotypes, of course, merely that cultural realities are not universally the same, and that language, which serves to interpret those realities, as well as to form them, is necessarily charged with identity.

Just as our personal identity finds areas of expression in questions of sex, class, career and so forth, in the same way these questions link us to our intra-personal or group identity. We see ourselves as belonging to a greater or lesser degree to these and other manifestations of a wider, socialised identity. As before, language plays a key role.

By its very existence, language makes self-expression possible. If the language is a shared one, it makes communication with others a possibility as well.

To return to the diagram. Let us examine the significance of change in these links. Any change in family circumstances is liable to be traumatic - births, marriages and deaths all rock the family boat and cause stress. Similarly, decisions to change one's career, religion, sex, or nationality - normally thought of as permanent, stable features of our lives - are not decisions to be undertaken lightly, for they will have inevitable repercussions and subject us to stress until the process of change and acceptance of that change are both complete. Questions of class change are difficult as well - we have all heard people say that they are middle-class, but that their parents were working-class and that they still share the old working-class values. Or, alternatively, there is the wistful harking-back to a real or imagined aristocratic past, now fallen on hard times.... either way, changes in one's sense of class identity *vis-à-vis* earlier generations do not always sit easy.

Questions of identity concern not only our self-concepts as individuals, but also as professional people or performers of given roles. Similarly, an expert in any other field is liable to feel greatly de-skilled when learning a new language, and this feeling can disturb the student greatly and even threaten the continuation and the eventual success of the course.

This connection between language and identity affects the learner at all levels, from beginner to advanced. Having to make alien sounds is perhaps bad enough, but even worse is the realisation of how limited we suddenly become when we are using a language other than our own. We are, in our own tongue, well-educated, articulate people, and able to express our own ideas about politics, social concerns, or the right ways to bring up children. We do this with ease, and think nothing of it. In Spanish, with concentrated hard work, practice and guidance from our tutors, we learn eventually to ask for an ice-cream. We do this with difficulty, and feel quite pleased with ourselves when it works.

Within the classroom context, of course, all the relationships that evolve in the group are initiated, sustained and finally terminated through language, ideally the target language for a good percentage of the time. It is through the group supporting and sheltering the individual that the initial experience of isolation, infantilisation and linguistic bereavement can be translated into an experience of personal growth and achievement. There is nothing quite like the experience of being able to communicate with others through a mouthful of air. We take it all too often for granted in our language, and we sometimes need to engage with a second language in order to see this communication for the miracle it is.

What is happening here is something like this. The bonds between language and personal identity on the one hand, and group identity on the other, have been loosened. We can still express our thoughts and feelings in our own language, and, indeed, the fact that we can continue to do so is in itself a complicating factor in the process of substituting new linguistic patterns for old. The problem is that our own language is not valid currency any more in the classroom, and we have to suppress it in order to make way for the new language. We are trying to overcome the habits of a lifetime by studying an alternative system for two or three hours a week.

The result of this exposure to a world in which everything is renamed is that the adult experiences a degree of infantilisation - a state of being reduced to a very halting level of communication. The early stages of second-language learning - and not only the early stages - are marked by the inability to express things correctly, and the learner only begins to function after a period of dysfunction. Our sense of self develops through a dialogue with our surrounding circumstances. There is an ambivalence in our own tongue about using the language to refer to our public and private worlds, for instance, to ourselves as subject or object, to give our thoughts free expression, or to give them the chance for concealment.

As for those aspects of our personality that we choose to express or conceal: we learn to be aware of the effect of our words and actions on other people, and we are generally aware when we have not told the truth. I do not mean when we have deliberately told a lie - I am referring to that sense of unease that comes when we

know that what we have said is only a vague and unsatisfactory approximation to the truth. Causing a false impression in our own language can be disturbing. We should not underestimate the frustration that can be caused when this is the best that we can hope to do in a language other than our own, simply because of the limitations on our use of the new patterns. It is our lack of skill, rather than any conscious wish to deceive, that obliges us to tell a pale, distorted version of the truth. Some adult learners take this as a sign of defeat - which it is not, merely an indication of how much of the road remains to be travelled - while others feel something close to guilt, and can even abandon their language studies altogether because of the sheer frustration at not being able to say what they mean.

Our notions of identity are formalised through naming processes - we name, and are named in turn by others, and these things that we are called can lead us from euphoria to the depths of depression, and back again as they add to the formation and stability of our self-concept. It is normal for children to be exposed to adult use of what will become their own language. It is also necessary, as children learn aspects of register, intonation and accent, as well as lexis and syntax, from hearing others, chiefly adults in the first instance, use them. As we know, this happens at a very early age, so that by the beginning of their third year of life, most children have received and elaborated on a vocabulary and a linguistic structure which is adequate to the daily requirements, though not yet capable of dealing with much that is abstract. As we know, a child's language continues to develop as the child matures, as does its notion of identity.

However, the adult who learns a second language does so under very different circumstances:

1) the adult has taken a conscious decision to study the language and this decision could be rescinded at any time.

2) the adult has a personal history and a sense of identity which can either be expressed or concealed in English. The adult has also become adept at such expression and concealment through decades of practice involving normally only one language.

3) the adult has a relatively stable understanding of the world.

If you and I were to learn another language - Spanish, for instance - the way we learned English, we would spend the first few months hearing a bombardment of messages that were being conveyed through sound, at the same time as trying to make sense of the chaos being revealed through our other senses. Gradually we would learn to sort out ways of producing sounds that were similar to those we heard. We would begin to understand that clusters of sound had meaning, and that variations in tone had implications. As our co-ordination increased we would learn to play with toys and mud and other learners, and accompany our play with words and commentary. Through language we would begin to make sense of the world around us, and through that early understanding our sensitivity to other things, including language itself, would be increased.

On the other hand, if you and I had learned English as we are encouraged to learn other tongues, our first statement as children would probably have been to announce our name and where we lived. We would then have gone shopping. We would have learned how to buy tomatoes and mineral water, and how to ask if there was any ice cream. Then it would be off to the bar for a much-needed drink, followed by the business of ordering in rapid succession a meal, a double hotel room with bath, and a return second-class ticket to Barcelona. Clearly there are unnatural processes at work in our approach to language teaching, when we compare it with the mechanisms whereby we acquire our mother tongue.

Possibly because these processes are unnatural, there is a very important sense in which the success of language learning within a group depends on the success of the group itself. The group process and the language-learning process run parallel to one another. Without strong group support and/or supportive teaching, the frustrations inherent in language learning can lead to group frustration and individual withdrawal. It also remains true that at any one time the individual's knowledge of the target language is less than the collective knowledge. The presence and support of the group is, to my mind, of crucial importance to the language learner.

One point of major interest and significance that has arisen from the interviews is the response of the interviewees when asked whether people (including themselves) behave differently according to the language they are speaking. Some claim to notice no difference in others or in themselves, but there are those - and they are in the majority - whose response is immediate and enthusiastic: yes, my son/daughter/friend is like a different person when they speak the second language. Far from seeing it as mere adaptive behaviour - out of English, into French, for instance, because one's listeners are French - I have been told repeatedly that a different personality is seen to emerge.

When people report this of themselves, it has tended to represent feelings of frustration - "I'm slower, more limited, dumber" - but often when others are referred to it is a positive thing - "she really comes alive, far more vivacious", etc. There are obviously contextual factors at work here, which may have much to do with the underlying relationship between the observer and the observed. With increasing expertise, we note an increasing recognition and acceptance of such change, not necessarily as a function of language, but of what language makes possible.

In addition to the stresses brought about in one's self-concept by change in any of these areas, there is the complementary stress associated with corresponding changes in group identity - the feeling of not belonging to a new group, or, in extreme cases, of not belonging any more to the old one. My research is interested in the language connection from this point of view: in what ways does the business of learning a language threaten or otherwise affect the adult learner's self-concept in the short, medium and long term, and in what ways and to what extent does the group identity help or hinder the learner in coming to terms with the stresses inherent in the learning, and thereby facilitate the language-learning process?

In order to explore these and related questions, what follows is divided into two sections. The first of these considers the relationship that may be said to exist between a given language and the realities that have formed and continue to form a context for that language's evolution and use, the processes by which language use is

able to accomplish the transmission of meaning. Against this background, the focus shifts to examine the circumstances of the adult learner of a second language, and Section 1 concludes with an examination of notions of individual and collective identity through a study of language-learning as a group activity.

Section 2 begins by exploring how far stereotypes of class, age, and gender affect the ways in which learners see themselves and are seen by others, and then addresses the language-learning process as it manifests itself in beginners, intermediate and advanced students. The thesis concludes with the pedagogical implications of the research.

CHAPTER 2

LANGUAGE AND REALITY

There are many skills which are essentially human, and which no other animals can perform. Fundamental to all of them, and endlessly intriguing in its own right, is the fact that human beings can represent their world and their relationship to the components of that world through an infinitely flexible series of symbolic structures, made explicit by the systematic distortion of a mouthful of air. As such, language has a unique position in the intellectual history of humanity, and is the central modality of being human within human collectives.

However, although it may be easy to talk about language and reality, these simple words mask a highly complex relationship. In order to understand that relationship, it will be helpful to identify a number of manifestations of each part of the equation. To address what is meant by reality first: there is a clear need to distinguish between absolute objective reality, and the sort of realities that language can convey. Objective reality is the stuff of religion and philosophy, and is made up of multiple lesser realities, some of which are revealed to particular human cultures and may, therefore, be susceptible to interpretation through whatever symbolic systems are employed by those cultures. Language is one such system, music is another.

"Reality" can also be taken to mean a system of cultural norms and beliefs derived from and sustained by this interpretation, and which forms the parameters within which most members of that culture will function. They will learn to behave, to speak and to think within those parameters, and they will find it dangerous to behave in ways that lie outside those parameters, and difficult to think beyond them. Nevertheless, different members of the culture will necessarily have different views of reality, and will therefore experience and express different aspects of those cultural norms which lend themselves to linguistic capture and transmission.

In parallel to all these varied interpretations of *reality*, there is the term *language*, and all that it can convey. It can be viewed as an object in its own right - one of the multiple fragments of objective reality. It can be seen as an ability or an instinct which is more fully developed in humans than in any other animal, but it must also be regarded as a cultural or societal feature which allows for intercommunication between members of the society and any others who have joined that linguistic group. It thus allows cultural norms to find expression, and to be defended and attacked, promoted and amended as the case may be. It is therefore intimately tied up with the cultural Weltanschauung for which it is a vehicle. Finally, and most commonly, it is the means whereby through our own idiosyncratic usage our individual voices can be heard, and an approximation of our thoughts and feelings expressed.

Once it had come into even rudimentary existence, language was bound to confer an immensely increased selective value on the capacity for recording, predicting and denying events, and for symbolic combination. It gave our early ancestors a method of engagement with the world that surrounded them, and of which they formed a part.

> 'In this hypothesis, language may have preceded, perhaps by some time, the emergence of a central nervous system particular to man and have contributed decisively to the selection of those variants aptest to utilise all its resources. In other words, language may have created man, rather than man language.' (Monod 1969, cited in Steiner 1975, 128.)

There is of course nothing new in the idea that human consciousness is dependent on language or linguistic processes. Verbal access theories of consciousness hold that the events that the mind experiences as conscious are those events which are processed by the language system of the brain. (Springer and Deutsch 1989, Jaynes 1993).

The acquisition and use of a language is one of the most extraordinary human cognitive capacities, not least because at the level of communicating individuals it allows the production of completely new sentences, and permits an evaluation of macro- and micro-cosmic events, as well as their comprehension. This process of

creation and re-creation is of enormous complexity, and yet it is a commonplace of human existence, effortless for the most part, and therefore taken for granted. There are many unanswered questions that surround everyday language use, such as how it works, what exactly is the knowledge that we need in order to make use of language, how is that knowledge acquired, and how is it used in the process of speaking and understanding? This thesis examines events surrounding second-language acquisition in adult learners, and must therefore touch upon these and other related problems, without attempting necessarily to provide definitive answers.

Any attempt to address the process of what happens when we temporarily abandon our native language, and begin to explore the world and ourselves through the medium of another tongue, must be seen in the context of a given view of language itself - what it is, what it is not, how it conveys or obscures meaning and in what ways and to what extent it represents reality. This chapter will attempt to explain my position, and an understanding of that position is essential to a full understanding of what is to follow in subsequent chapters. I must therefore begin with the ideas of Saussure and Whorf.

We owe to Saussure the idea that language plays an important part in structuring our experience of the world. There are two specific and interwoven strands of his argument that contribute to our understanding of this question. The first of these is the idea that language is in some sense prior to and instrumental in the structuring of thought.

> Psychologically our thought - apart from its expression in words - is only a shapeless and indistinct mass. Philosophers and linguists have always agreed in recognising that without the help of signs we would be unable to make a clear-cut, consistent distinction between two ideas. Without language, thought is a vague, uncharted nebula. There are no pre-existing ideas and nothing is distinct before the appearance of language. Thought, chaotic by nature, has to become ordered in its decomposition. (Saussure,1974, 112)

So, for Saussure, language creates the very structure of thought, and it does so by chopping reality up into conceptual chunks. The acquisition of a language provides us with a tool with which to interpret reality from a uniquely human viewpoint, and to convey aspects of that interpretation to others who share the same language.

The second crucial strand in Saussure's thinking is the idea that different languages chop up reality in different ways, or at different points. At a superficial level, British school students often respond intuitively to this feeling by saying that French is 'stupid', having more than one way of saying 'you', or Spanish with two words for 'to be', and so forth. This is, perhaps naturally in the case of school children, to take a very simplistic view of the problem. At a deeper level, of course, lies the important fact that not only the mechanics of grammatical structure can be expected to differ from language to language, but so too - and crucially - can creative metaphorical usage.

Crucial to our understanding of both these levels is Saussure's claim that a language

> "constitutes a system of interrelated terms, such that the 'value' of any linguistic term derives from its relationship to all the other terms in the system." (Lee 1992, 193)

This is one of the most fundamental principles of the structural approach to language. It appears to strengthen the suggestion that the terms in one language system are not commensurable with those in another, so that different languages inescapably appear to 'carve up' reality in different ways. There is much to be said for this argument. Our native language - whatever it happens to be - operates by means of a set of symbolic terms that stand in a highly structured set of relationships to one another. If we wish to understand the process whereby we construct, encode and communicate our experience of our own partial reality, then the existence and nature of this set of relationships are clearly important.

These two strands, taken together, lead us towards the idea that to acquire a particular language is to acquire a particular way of perceiving the world. In the process,

Saussure's view requires one to think not only that reality lends itself to this type of chunking and encapsulation, but also that language is an instrument capable of doing this. However, we are not concerned here with the accuracy or otherwise of the symbolic representation of reality through language in general or through a given language in particular, merely with the operation of the process. If this is truly the way in which language works, then it must be possible to find evidence of this process. If we can find one language in which the relationship clearly exists, then we can agree on the potential for a linguistic system to encompass this process. This does not mean, necessarily, that all languages perform in this way, but merely that the potential for such performance exists.

It is one of the features of language that it is able to perform what Churchland (cited in Damasio et al, 1992, 63) calls "*cognitive compression*". It allows us to sub-divide the world into distinct categories which we can foreground at will, and in the process we are able to reduce the enormous complexity of our cognitive system and conceptual structures to a somewhat more manageable proportion. We need to be able to this, as we can only deal with a limited amount of information at any one time. Once this information has been reduced to manageable chunks, we continue to use those chunks as a model for further exploration. (Bruner 1983) This is not a one-way process - by imposing this type of compression we allow ourselves to think about the world in particular ways, but this frequently precludes our being able to think about the same world in other ways. Therefore we and our thought patterns become the creatures of our environment, and the prisoners to some degree of our language. This can often lead us into accepting the erroneous notion that some special relationship exists between our native language and reality.

To speak loosely of "reality" in this way is to suggest that there is only one, that it is accessible to human understanding, and that language, whether it serves as key or catalyst, might be the way to understand it. In point of fact, it is the business of science to examine the secrets of various aspects of this overall reality, and the business of scientific language to make this process coherent and accessible. Most day to day language use has a different aim, and serves to explain, comment on, defend or change the cultural realities proper to its own social environment. The

special relationship, if there is one, exists not between a specific language and the universal truths, but between a specific language and the cultural realities surrounding its evolution and its use.

Dixon's work on the Dyirbal language of North Queensland (Dixon, 1972) allows us to examine the process whereby linguistic behaviour echoes certain key aspects of cultural reality. While French - for instance - is content to divide its nouns into two grammatical gender categories, Dyirbal contains four grammatical sub-classes of noun. Class A and B are in many ways comparable to the gender system as it operates in French or Spanish, and Class D is a residual one, where all nouns that do not fit into the other three categories are consigned. From a Saussurean point of view, the interesting class is Class C, which is the category in which edible substances belong. It is reasonable to attribute this highly unusual categorisation to the fact that 'reality' for a Dyirbal-speaker consists of life in a harsh and hostile climate, in which food is far from abundant and where such edible substances as do exist are not always easy to recognise. Language in this case is indeed appearing to reflect one way of dividing up reality, as the distinction between what is edible and what is not remained of crucial importance in the Dyirbal-speaking world. (Dixon 1972, Lee 1992.)

Once significant aspects of the world have been made manageable in this way, newcomers to the language find that reality is, for them, already structured by patterns of language use. For the Dyirbal learner, this type of linguistic determinism is precisely what is happening as, through learning the language, the child becomes sensitised to the distinction between the edible and the inedible. The formal language patterns operate to structure the child's perceptions and behaviour. As Lee (1992) has argued, the distinction between linguistic determinism and social determinism does not have to involve positions which are contradictory or mutually incompatible. Like so much else, this is a matter of perspective:

> The view that one adopts on this question will depend to a large extent on whether one takes an historical perspective, considering how linguistic systems change and evolve through time under the influence of changing social and environmental factors, or whether

> one is concerned with the way in which the structure of the system at some particular time impinges on and interacts with the development of the child. (Lee 1992, 36)

Saussure had drawn a distinction between the meaning of a word, and its 'value' in different languages. He based this argument on the use of terms such as *'sheep'* and *'mouton'* in English and French, whose meanings necessarily overlap, but which allow for different conceptual interpretations, and he found support here for his argument that different languages construct different conceptual systems. Part of the problem with this is the implicit assumption that there are strict limitations on the value of terms such as 'sheep' and 'mouton', and that some form of consensus exists among native speakers as to what these limitations are. In point of fact, as language operates in the real world there are enormous differences between the values attributed, even to a simple word like *'sheep'* and in what is held to be the same language, by an urban vegetarian on the one hand and a Cumbrian hill-farmer on the other.

At the same time we must consider two conflicting views of language. It has been viewed as an object, as something that native speakers acquire, by those who, like Chomsky, have endeavoured to describe and make sense of the phonological and grammatical systems that constitute language. At an intuitive level, there is a feeling that this is common sense, and many of our normal everyday ways of talking about language would seem to reinforce this view. However, if language is such an object it should be susceptible, theoretically at least, to scientific analysis, and to some extent this has been achieved.

On the other hand, it has also been seen as an aspect of human behaviour, an instinct that we humans possess as other life forms lay eggs or breathe under water. Broadly speaking, this contrasting view is held by those who study the ways in which language is used in society (Bakhtin, Slobin, Lee, Pinker). According to this view, although the abstract grammar system underlying the use of a given language may be unitary if we take it in isolation from the ideological concepts that find expression through it, social use of language reveals

> within an abstractly unitary national language a multitude of concrete worlds, a multitude of bounded verbal-ideological and social belief systems (Bakhtin 1981, P288, cited in Lee 92, 50)

Saussure's image of language segmenting reality can be misleading, in that it seems to suggest a far more rigid structure and compartmentalisation of our concepts than is in fact the case. The Cumbrian "*sheep*" is a case in point, in which we can clearly see two, out of the many possible interpretations of the word, failing to coincide. Lakoff (1987) has shown that in fact conceptual 'units' are characterised by complex internal structure, and that these conceptual networks may connect, interweave and overlap with other networks in highly intricate ways. Language as human behaviour is necessarily a far messier concept than language as an object.

So far we have seen the arguments in support of the notion that language - in both structure and use - reflects human patterns of understanding of reality. There is also the equally important claim that language does not merely reflect, but actively serves to construct these networks of concepts which we all use and which are fundamental to our communication with one another. This type of linguistic determinism is what we see in the case of the Dyirbal learner - through the process of learning the language, the child is becoming sensitised to the all-important distinction between edible and inedible objects. The formal patterns of the structure of the language are operating here to guide and formulate the child's perceptions.

Two points emerge from this. The first is that although the individual is exposed through language to the world-view of the society, and will come to share many aspects of that world-view, I would argue that the individual and the society are not world-viewers in the same way. Within a linguistic society, such as that of Great Britain, there exists a number of sub-divisions of language use, such as professional terminology and jargon, for example, prison slang, various exclusive interest-groups formed primarily but not only among young people who are seeking a sense of identity, the incorporation into the mainstream of non-English words used by members of ethnic minorities, and so forth. At the level below this we observe the idiosyncratic use of language by the individual speaker on a given occasion.

Furthermore, individuals are still the elements of potential change within their community. Whorf suggests that world-view is homogeneous, shared by all the speakers of a particular language, but this is oversimplifying reality. There are many people within a given linguistic community who share important and identifying aspects of the community's cultural belief system, but there are many who would not freely adhere to one or other element of that system. Discrepancies between the community world-view and that of the individual, as well as differences between one individual and the next, will be reflected in language use.

The second point is that those who postulate the deterministic function of language (Whorf, Sapir) base their arguments for the most part on language structure and on the fact that structure evolves only slowly. This would suggest that world-view, at least at the cultural level, is relatively static, and that language would need to change fundamentally if society were to do so. The world is changing, with unprecedented speed, in that technological advances continue to affect the ways in which many of us live. The deep structures of a society, however, continue to reflect its past rather than its current innovations.

Language thus operates at two levels: not only does it reflect our understanding (at an individual or societal level) of the realities that surround us, but it also serves to structure that understanding, so that we adopt a world-view within which the parameters of what is possible are partly established by the language that we speak. Social determinism and linguistic determinism are necessary factors in our formation, and there is no reason why they should not both be expected to operate on us. One point at which we can force them apart, in order to see more clearly how they operate, is when we consider the learning of a second language, once childhood is past. (See Chapter 4, The Adult Learner).

Traditionally, language has been reified, treated as an object in its own right, something that existed independently of anyone using it, and independently of any given context. As such, it allows itself to be acquired by native speakers, easily and quickly, during the early stages of their lives. During the course of this process, as we

have seen, the young learner learns, in addition to language but also as a result of it, to segment reality up into manageable chunks, in a way which is in every case peculiar to a specific language. As a result of this chunking the young language learner imposes on his/her cognitive awareness a particular world-view that is held in common with other speakers of that language. Sharing as they do the same language, and the same cognitive system, communication is relatively straightforward. Meaning is encoded and conveyed, and it is clear in most cases whether a sentence is true or false.

Although things were very different at the time when language was evolving, it is no longer the norm for human beings to live within the confines of their own culture and without contact or influence from other - sometimes substantially different - cultures. Societies and the individuals who compose them are inevitably in touch with other world-views than their own. This contact is sometimes peaceful, sometimes not, but it invariably is a force for potential change in world-view. Although linguistic structure may be a fairly stable phenomenon, linguistic usage, particularly metaphor, is the living surface of the language, and responds rapidly to innovation. This is true at the level of a society as a whole, and even more so at the level of an individual language user. The ways in which individual people use language are based on the foundation of their prior cognitive structures as individuals, and these are diverse and flexible.

We are of course used to the idea that language changes to reflect a changing reality. This has always been so. For the last time in human history, the New World adventure created a situation in which mutual understanding through spoken language was not just a problem, but an impossibility. When the native American and the Spaniard faced each other for the first time there was no common language, barring gesture. But the need for communication is so important in human terms, and language so flexible and responsive a system for such communication, that change has always been rapid. Nebrija's dictionary, published in 1495, already contained the first Americanism in the Castilian language: *Canoa*: *boat made from a single timber.* It had not taken the word or the concept long to reach Europe, and others would soon follow - *tomato, chilli, potato, tobacco....* Since that time, as the globe becomes ever smaller, languages have been accommodating one another to unprecedented degrees, as well as continuing to evolve in response to their own internal pressures and

requirements. At the societal level, then, changes in the world-view are accompanied by lexical changes to cope with whatever has impinged on the society from outside.

When new words like tomato and canoe enter another language, they are contributing to that language and to the experience of those who speak it. They are also establishing a tiny area of common ground between the users of the languages concerned - the donor and the receiver languages - where human beings can find their common humanity. That may seem like an enormous claim to make on behalf of a tomato, but all languages now contain borrowings from elsewhere, words that somehow encapsulate a subtlety of meaning, or a detail of experience for which the host language formerly had no precise term. There is no longer any such thing as a language which has not been affected - whether contaminated or enriched is a question of viewpoint - by others.

What is not debatable, however, is the fact that languages do not come into contact with one another in a political vacuum. From the moment of contact between two cultures or between two aspects of the same culture, questions arise of political choice as to which language code, if either, will predominate and in which area or areas of life. The language that we speak is intimately bound up with our notions of identity - cultural and individual - as I shall show, and this operates at the level of each one of us no less than it does at the level of the society as a whole.

All cultures have points of contact with others - these contacts include the linguistic interface of trade languages and borrowings. Such contacts modify the experience of the language community, and that of its members. To see this process in action, it is enough to return to Dixon's work on the Dyirbal language. As younger generations of Dyirbal speakers are using English more and more as a way of communicating not only beyond the Dyirbal-speaking world but also - and this is the crucial point - within it, this assimilation into a different linguistic culture has been accompanied by a shift in the usage of the native tongue - the use of category C for edible nouns is disappearing. In the supermarket age, the names of edible nouns are being re-allocated to more familiar gender groups. The change in cultural identity is being mirrored by a change in linguistic use. It is important to differentiate structure, on the

one hand, and use, on the other. What has happened in the case of Dyirbal is that at a certain stage in its development the language evolved a culturally-significant structure which is now falling into disuse. The structure continues to exist as a template for grammatically viable constructs, and as a way of codifying certain aspects of external reality. Usage, however, is beginning to relegate it to a position of secondary importance. This distinction between linguistic structure and metaphorical usage is of crucial importance when we try to understand the ways in which we as individuals relate, through our language, to the realities of our worlds.

However, language is not only used in order to refer to salient aspects of external reality. As it is also used to express - and suppress - aspects of internal reality, change not only in the cultural make-up but also in individual experience will lead to a corresponding capacity for change in individual expression. Once we have, as individuals, established language as a legitimate pattern of behaviour (i.e., after childhood vagaries are eliminated and once adult idiosyncrasies fall within the normal parameters that govern intelligibility) then the two strands of linguistic and social determinism no longer need to be taken in isolation. It is right and necessary to identify them as component strands, so that they can be examined and more thoroughly understood, but it is unhelpful to see them as in some way mutually exclusive factors in linguistic performance.

The first sub-division of our experience of reality is the one which allows us to make a distinction between the concepts of *I* and *not-I* - in other words, the notion that we have of our discrete identity as being, in some ways, separable from the rest of our experience. Once that distinction has been achieved, considerable amounts of time and energy are invested throughout the rest of our lives in the reconciliation of these two concepts.

The world of *not-I* demands our attention. Dangers lurk there, and rewards, and there appear to be discernible patterns of linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour which can lead us in the direction of one or the other. The search for such patterns is the search for meaning, and language is a powerful tool for making sense of the world that surrounds us. The greater our control of language, the greater the ease with which we

can organise the world into manageable categories. By continuing the process of categorisation, we can sub-divide categories of experience *ad infinitum* and arrive potentially at an equation between the word and the object which will allow for a taxonomy of experience and hence for the transmission of meaning. This leads us back towards a highly traditional view of language, according to which language itself exists objectively, independent of individual users or contexts. It exists to be used, and it exists, therefore, to be acquired by native speakers, who acquire it rapidly, normally as children, in the course of their development. In the process, the child learns to segment reality, for ease of manipulation and understanding, and learns to do so in accordance with the norms of the socio-linguistic group; i.e., elaborating a particular world-view which is language-specific. This world-view is imposed on the child by the language, and is shared with other speakers of the same language. Communication now becomes a possibility, not only because the language operates as a vehicle for the encoding and transmission of meaning, but also because the interlocutors share the same cognitive system. It is therefore clear in most cases whether a statement concerning objective reality is true or false.

A given language evolves, however, only in order to give expression to those aspects of reality that are immediate and relevant to the world as it is known to the speakers of that language. But, as Ortega y Gasset observes, *"Al conversar vivimos en sociedad, al pensar nos quedamos solos"*, [1] and our knowledge of the world, as individuals, is partial. Our mastery of our own language, as individuals, is also partial and varies enormously from one person to the next. Furthermore, the world of external reality contains much that is not an object, and much that cannot be reified without distortion. This fact raises an important question relating to the matter of world-view. Whorf has pointed out that in many languages, concepts such as *storm, wave, lightning, wind* etc. behave like verbs, although they are nouns in English and, indeed, the concepts that correspond to these terms do refer to events as much as they do to nouns. Just as the Dyirbal speaker is able - and thus constrained - to relegate edible objects to a particular language category, so too, arguably, the English speaker will conceptualise a waterfall in a different way from a speaker of Hopi, whose language deals with it as an event rather than an object.

However a given language may address such problems, its ability to cope with the whole of reality is necessarily limited. Much of the world's greatest literature - and, for that matter, much of the worst - strives towards the expression of elusive realities of experience or feeling that are somehow held to be 'too deep for words'. Language is a construct that exists within reality - it can not, therefore, either embrace or equate with reality. It must always run the risk of falling short of expressing what we wish to say, and the failure of language to express our thoughts is familiar to us all, as we strive to represent what Steiner has termed

> a syntax of shape, colour, motion, spatial relations, that is somehow located in the mind but 'lies further' than words. (Steiner 1975, 129.)

If language can make man able to feel at home in the world, it also has the power to alienate. Indeed, even while feeling at home in the world through language we do, and do not, represent that world as it is; at best it allows us to reach a close approximation, but also, arguably, language remains

> the main instrument of man's refusal to accept the world as it is. (Steiner 75, 217-8.)

Structurally, any language is a system, and despite the fact that it is required to respond to ever-changing realities in the external world of *not-I* and the internal world of *I*, and must therefore be adaptable and susceptible to evolution, it has regularity and rules of order. The system is arbitrary, depending on user convention for its ability to convey meaning. (See Chapter 2, Language and Meaning) A given language is used for communicative purposes by a group who constitute the speech or language community. Thousands of varieties of language continue to flourish, although languages are, as we have seen in the case of Dyirbal, susceptible to decay and eventual language death. For some students of language, this proliferation is an indication of

[1] "In our conversations we live in a society, in our thoughts we are alone."

> the human desire to stake particular linguistic claims to the world, to create unique perspectives on reality and to create group distinctiveness. (Edwards, 1985, 16)

The function of the native language as a component part of the collective identity is of key importance in our lives as social beings. Steiner makes the suggestion that the use of a separate shared language makes it possible for groups not only to maintain and promote the "inherited, singular springs of their identity" (Steiner 1975, 232) within their social settings but also, by implication, the inability to use a particular language on demand immediately identifies the members of an out-group.

Not only does language serve to bind us closely to the group whose world has been explored and whose mysteries revealed through the language that is used within it, and so determining to a degree the world-view that we adopt as individuals, but it also structures and inhibits our relationship with our selves, becoming in the process an important feature of our individual identity. Precisely how crucial the relationship is has been the subject of much debate (Steiner 1975, Edwards 1985, Appel and Muysken 1987, Evans 1988, Harre 1989, Lee 1992, Pinker 1994 *inter alia*) and Chapter 8 sets out to explore aspects of this relationship.

Once again, it is essential to remain aware of the distinction between language *per se,* and the use of a given language or a variant of that language as it operates in the real world. Language is itself part of our human reality, and a given language must be learned, in part, as it involves sharing a code and a system of beliefs about language with others. Even within a given language, we must not confuse structure with usage. Whorf's arguments are based primarily on structural aspects of particular languages. Structure is relatively stable, as we have seen, and evolves slowly. If language structure and world-view are linked, as Whorf suggests, we could infer from this that world-view is likewise relatively stable and slow to change within a linguistic community. There is the further, and more dubious, inference that world-view is homogeneous, and that all the speakers of a particular language share that view, unlike, by implication, the speakers of other languages.

Rom Harre argues that beliefs are carried by the learning of grammar ,

> ....or to put the matter clearly, we could express in the rhetoric of belief part of the grammar of certain kinds of discourses. That is, certain rules of grammar could be stated, were we so minded, as beliefs, for instance for expository purposes.... (Harre, 1989, 26)

In other words, at the structural levels of language there are features which dictate not only the way in which we express our thoughts but also the ways in which we cannot express them.

It is metaphor, however, in the everyday usage of a language, which allows communication to work. Here we are not considering structure, but usage. Lee observes that we use the terminology of warfare to refer to arguments, as do many other languages, although there is nothing in the structure of the language that would force us to do so. This happens

> because of the fact that we perceive features that are common to the two kinds of activity. In this case, then, it is not that language structures perception. Rather, patterns of language usage follow from the prior foundation of cognitive structures. (Lee 1992, 75-6.)

Not all native speakers are equally adept at the sophisticated use of metaphor. Backgrounds of social class, gender, educational experience and so on, together with inherent personal characteristics, mean that we do not all master our own language to the same degree, and that the supposed homogeneity of language-linked world-view is an inaccurate perception. Moreover, social divisions of this kind intensify rather than diminish differences in world-view as well as in the ability to express them (See Chapter 9)

It was Humboldt who realised that language acts as an intermediary between the individual and the world. The two exist as realities in their own right, but what makes the link between them a possibility is the resource of language:

> Humboldt arrives at a key notion: language is a 'third universe' midway between the phenomenal reality of the 'empirical world' and the internalised structures of consciousness. It is this median quality, this material and spiritual simultaneity, that makes of language the defining pivot of man and the determinant of his place in reality. Seen thus, language is a universal. But so far as each human tongue differs from every other, the resulting shape of the world is subtly or drastically altered. (Steiner 1975, 81-2).

This situation is further complicated by the fact that not only does each human language differ from the others but so too does each human mind, and therefore the ability of that mind to find expression through language.

The relationship between each of us and the world of reality that surrounds us and of which we form a part is maintained through language. Different aspects of this relationship are thus at once peculiar to the human species, to the culture or sub-culture to which the individual belongs, and to each of us as individuals. At the level of the species, language is a tool that humans use, partly learned, partly intuited and reinvented through instinct and familiarity. At the level of the culture to which we belong, enormous cultural and linguistic variations are a feature of the human experience, and it is clear that to some degree the language through which information about the world is filtered, presented and received, is instrumental in shaping and limiting the ways in which we can think about that world. At an individual level, our personal attributes of intelligence, education, exposure to the world in general and to language in particular, together with our view of ourselves as language-users within our community, all affect the relationship that we can expect to have with language in general.

As private individuals, we operate language in our own idiosyncratic ways. Bound necessarily by the conventions of linguistic structure, and limited and inspired by the metaphorical richness of the language that we use, we all are subject to giving particular nostalgic or affective value to certain words or combinations of sound. An essential part of all language is, in fact, private, in that a given term is likely to mean something subtly different for many of the people who use it. Communication through language is a communication between privacies, where what the speaker intends to convey and what the listener initially understands are not necessarily related with precision. Moreover, a speaker in control of language always has the protective option of untruth.

When we focus on the individual's use of language as a tool which is both interpretative and constructive of personal identity and the surrounding society, we might expect that profound consequences would follow any attempt to substitute the normal patterns of mother-tongue with any other system. Not only would fluency be necessarily affected, but the results of any such change would be far-reaching, as language impinges in crucial and complex ways on adult social life. As Argyle reminds us, marital discontent, job satisfaction and productivity are all affected by the exchange of open messages in both directions.

It is necessary to reconcile and synthesise opposing views of language, and to see it at once as both an instinct and a phenomenon in its own right. It is the interplay between these two facets of language which allows it the flexibility to allow it to be used for idiosyncratic use, while at the same time permitting successful communication by adhering to structural rules. It is at this level of operation of language that the complexities of communication become utterly absorbing. In Pinker's terms,

> People are more than curious about language; they are passionate. The reason is obvious. Language is the most accessible part of the mind. (Pinker 1994, 404)

How we are able to use that accessible part of the mind to communicate with others like ourselves, is the subject of Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

LANGUAGE AND MEANING

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master - that's all."

(Alice Through the Looking Glass)

The function of language, and its *modus operandi*, is the evocation of ideas rather than their representation. In the process it allows us to relate various aspects of our human experience to conceptual categories, for our own enlightenment and that of others. Linguistic expression may well be a map of a kind, and helpful in the business of trying to impose a sense of structure on to our perception of the world, but it is not a map of cognition. As Slobin points out, language, as well as operating according to an agreed set of conventions, is highly selective in what it actually conveys.

> Language evokes ideas; it does not represent them. Linguistic expression is thus not a map of consciousness or thought. It is a highly selective and conventionally schematic map. At the heart of language use is the tacit assumption that most of the message can be left unsaid, because of mutual understanding (and probably also mutual impatience). (Slobin 1982, 131-2)

This compounds the problem. There are times in a verbal exchange when mutual understanding is a prerequisite to survival, yet it is much more easily said than done. Underlying what we say is, or ought to be, our evaluation of the interlocutor's viewpoint, as well as an awareness of the biases of our own perspective. Like ourselves, our audience will be blessed with some knowledge, certain attitudes and

prejudices, as well as areas of ignorance, with which we hope our words will interact to produce a good enough evocation of ideas. However, all these areas of uncertainty despite which normal communication does indeed happen, suggest that the traditional view of language as described in Chapter 2 is misleadingly prescriptive and exact.

By contrast, an epiphenomenalist view of language (Moore and Carling, 1982) suggests that things are far less rigid and clear-cut than we have been asked to believe. It may rather be that utterances do not transfer meaning from A to B, but instead they interact with a particular set of conceptual structures in order to produce meaning. From an epiphenomenalist viewpoint, language is more like a catalyst than a vehicle. While chunking of the world around us does happen and may be language-specific, it seems probable that the units into which reality is broken down are much less discrete than the traditional view suggests. One of the reasons for this lies in the fact that the real world contains many phenomena with ill-defined boundaries. Some external phenomena such as lightning, waves, storms, and some internal phenomena such as pain, love or forgetfulness, seem to share object-like and event-like properties. As a result they appear in different languages in different grammatical categories. In all these situations where either linguistic categories or real-world phenomena pose problems of taxonomy, a particular language focuses on certain aspects of a phenomenon and correspondingly backgrounds others. Precisely which ones a given language focuses on, is a function of the depth of field of the language concerned.

So, if the reality of the situation is that our native language does not necessarily organise the world along clear-cut categorical lines, we can no longer believe that clear-cut, categorical meaning can be transmitted from speaker to listener. If meaning is not transmitted in this way, we still need to account for the association between the sentence and the world, as the fact remains that the sentence is somehow invested with meaning, which allows us to judge it as truth or falsehood. However, as Lee points out,

> ... in order to make sense of the world, we clearly do have to make connections between different areas of experience and many of these connections are shared by other speakers of our language. This is

> due to the existence of certain conceptual units in our language - units which constitute the building-blocks of our experience - and because of the existence of certain ways of talking about events that are prevalent in our speech community. (Lee 1992, 193)

This problem of endeavouring to make sense of the world has its roots in the fact that the "reality" with which language attempts to grapple is not a one-dimensional, unifaceted thing. Neither, of course, is language itself. But if we add to the paradoxes and complexities of reality, the shifting, multifaceted nature of language, the wonder is that communication should ever happen at all, never mind that it should happen regularly and successfully. (Lee 1992, Pinker 1994). Language use, however, is only one of the essential ingredients involved in the production of meaning. As I have suggested, the contribution of the knowledge base of the speaker and of the addressee is of crucial importance. This becomes inescapably obvious when we posit an addressee and a speaker who do not share a common language - and this, of course, is the situation in which we ask adult second-language learners to place themselves at the beginning of their studies - but it is a constant factor in communication of all kinds.

Clearly, language does work. We find ourselves obliged to make connections between different areas of our own experience and that of others, as we understand it to be, and many of the connections that we make are shared by other people who speak the same language as ourselves. Not because the language that we use organises the world around us into clear-cut categories, but rather because there are conceptual units which are expressible through our language and which serve as landmarks on our cognitive map. These conceptual units can be expressed through language and made accessible to others because within every speech community there are certain ways of referring to events which are universally recognised. What has been learned through language is not a common cognitive grid, but a shared system capable of expressing a variety of levels of cognitive awareness. And at the heart of that shared system is metaphor, symbol, conscious and unconscious (mis)representation.

Communication is a two-way process, whatever form that communication takes. It is self-evidently so in the case of a conversation, but no less the case when we are considering, for example, the reading of a text:

> ....paradoxical as it may seem, both the production of a text and the interpretation of a text have an interpretative character. The producer of the text constructs the text as an interpretation of the world, or of the facets of the world which are then in focus; formal features of the text are traces of that interpretation. The traces constitute *cues* for the next interpreter, who draws upon her assumptions and expectations (incorporated in frames) to construct her interpretation of the text. Thus text interpretation is *the interpretation of an interpretation.* (Fairclough 1989, 80)

Operating the metaphor, whether as speaker or addressee, is the individual. But the individual is no more of a unifaceted creature than any of the other concerns of this study. Our name is quite properly Legion, for we are indeed many. In some ways we tend to see ourselves as somehow separate from the society in which we operate, somehow standing outside the group and existing (certainly on our own cognitive map) from some period prior to the group's formation. But we also recognise that we are complex and composite personalities, "dispersed" in Foucault's terms among the various subject positions. Some of these dispersals occur sequentially, but many combinations of them occur simultaneously.

It is metaphor which has the power to socialise us according to culture-specific modes of perception. This process happens, however, not as an inescapable result of linguistic structure, but as a result of ever-changing usage.[2] It is also crucially important to recognise that through metaphor a language user acquires many ways of structuring an area of experience. Language structure might be monolithic,

[2] A twelve-year-old student of mine from Peterlee, after an enjoyable visit to a local church as part of a History project, wrote a tribute in the visitors' book. The pleasure behind her comment of "A hellish church" was no less sincere than the vicar's horror on reading what she had written. It is usage that is the key here, and in this sense the argument distances itself from the emphasis that Saussure and Whorf give to the relationship between linguistic structure and perspective.

homogeneous, and slow to change, as Whorf believes.. Language use is quite the opposite. Not only is established metaphorical practice extremely flexible, but it is also open to alteration and decay. As our world alters, new metaphor emerges.

For those to whom the new metaphor is strange, as also for those to whom the old metaphor appears archaic and irrelevant, language use once again emphasises the differences between "us" and "them", and provides a measure of belonging to, or diverging from, the in-group. An obstacle for the adult second-language learner lies in the fact that certain metaphors are so central to the way in which native speakers of a language express themselves, that it is impossible to acquire the language without also acquiring these ways of perceiving and conceptualising the phenomena concerned. But we do not choose our own perspectives. They are forced upon us, not by language though frequently through it, but by our culture and the niche within our culture that we appear to ourselves - and to others - to occupy. (Lee 1992, Evans 1990) In our own language, as in our culture, social identity and perspective go hand in hand. We experience social processes and we understand and relate to them in the light of those factors which have had a part to play in forming our own social identity. Gender, age, social class, our ethnic background and so forth - all the factors which make us individuals, also make us use and react to language in particular ways. We develop a significant relationship with our own language, one which will have an enormous power to affect whether we succeed or fail in the business of learning a second language. If we see ourselves as ensnared in the web of our own language, we are unlikely to make much progress with another. But if we see ourselves as capable of using that language as a net to capture thoughts and ideas at will, then our prospects of success in a second language are greatly enhanced.

The position of the adult learner who begins the study of a new language is addressed below in Chapter 4. What remains in this chapter is to establish how language, through both structure and usage, relates to and attempts to convey certain aspects of reality. In other words, we have first to address the problem of meaning and how it is conveyed, and then return to the subject of Chapter 2, namely, the individual understanding of reality, including the spectre of self.

First of all, it is self-evident that the acquisition of speech is conducive to an enormous increase in conceptual power. (Monod, 1969, Steiner, 1975) The structural and metaphorical components of language combine in a symbolic memory which enables us to manipulate, refine and control vast numbers of new concepts. Language remains a symbolic structure, however, and conveys meaning by allusion. The notion of words as somehow "containing" meaning is inaccurate. Language does, in some ways, operate like a mechanical system, but this is at the level of structure, not at the level of meaning. Similarly, our processing of language in the brain does not presuppose the existence of language centres "containing" concepts. Meaning, as Edelman points out

> ....arises from the interaction of value-category memory with the combined activity of conceptual areas and speech areas. (Edelman 1992, 130)

Meaning, then, is something that we constantly construct and reconstruct as we encode and decode our messages to ourselves and to one another. Those messages inevitably concern particular foregrounded aspects of reality, including, in certain circumstances, our selves. The notion of the self arguably has its origins in interpersonal contact, (Bruner, 1990) and whether foregrounded or not the self remains an inescapable factor in the process of encoding and decoding. We interpret the things that we do and hear and see and we relate them to our selves, and to the ways in which they may affect us.

At an earlier stage in this discussion it became important to disentangle language structure from language use. It is no less important to distinguish throughout what is to follow the notions of 1) language *per se*, which is a faculty or instinct or skill or all three,
2) a particular language such as French or Dyirbal, which is a cultural artefact, and
3) our individual and idiosyncratic use of our native tongue, which, like the specific language concerned, is intimately tied in with our own, and others' notions of our identity.

The need for this distinction is clear: when a child learns to speak his or her native tongue, both of these elements are being developed simultaneously - the faculty, and the cultural artefact. The two are intimately bound together, and neither can develop in the absence of the other. Nevertheless, they remain two discrete and entirely separable phenomena. The acquisition of a first language - regardless of what that language might be - is tacit recognition of the fact that reality lends itself to being encoded and decoded via a linguistic system; that such a system possesses a (necessarily) finite number of structural features; and that the finite nature of the structure permits an infinite variety of usage. Pinker's observation that "...language is no more a cultural invention than is upright posture" (Pinker 1994, 18) while arguably true, refers only to the existence of language *per se*, and not to the areas of language use where variations in meaning and value are of great significance. The language instinct in itself, to use Pinker's (1994) term, is no more than the first essential stage in the process of what we, collectively and individually, are to become.

William James complains of how "the mind debauched by learning" can be responsible for "making the natural seem strange". But language *is* strange. It allows a human being to describe an event through the sounds produced by deforming a mouthful of exhaled air. This is nothing short of miraculous. Far from being a mechanical system, in which meaning is somehow boxed into words and transmitted from speaker to listener, the language faculty is something infinitely richer and stranger even than that. The amazing thing is that communication happens at all.

We do not have to travel very far from our normal language use in order to see how true this observation is. It is enough to consider language dysfunction - stammering, for instance, or the distorting effects of a stroke, or cerebral palsy, or aphasia, to see how easily and how drastically the communicative faculty can be reduced. Meaning is suddenly hidden, or even disappears with no apparent trace. At a less traumatic level, the ease with which a careless - or even a careful - remark can be misunderstood shows that when two people are ostensibly speaking the same language, they are not necessarily speaking the same language, while the confusion and trauma attendant upon attempts to express our thoughts in a language other than our own is evidence

enough to unmask the illusory nature of what we normally accept as the effortlessness of communication.

Let us return for a moment to what Saussure has described as "a shapeless and indistinct mass" - thought, in the absence of language. Behind our verbal and non-verbal communication there is thought in operation, and this thought takes what coherence it has from the fact that not only does it lend itself to expression through the medium of language, but it also appears to function through language of a kind. If asked, we as English-speakers would probably claim to "think in English", and we would intuitively assume that speakers of other languages thought in those languages just as we claim to in English. A common classroom complaint when languages are being studied is that the student is "thinking in English", rather than in the target language.

It is true that when we are involved in a deliberate process of concentrated thought, focused on a particular theme, we are aware of aspects of that thought presenting themselves to us sequentially, grammatically, and in an identifiable language, much as in the nature of speech. However, this is far from being the only type of thought in which we are involved. Most of the time our thinking is less focused, less evidently sequential and coherent, and it swoops and swirls around at levels of which we are barely conscious. If we were able to snatch at elements of this type of thought and hold them still long enough to have a good look at them, other people would find them completely incoherent - indeed, we would probably find them so ourselves.

This is thought operating at levels below language, or below the levels that serve to demarcate one language from another. Mentalese (Pinker 1994) is the currency here - the language of thought, rather than a language of people. Mentalese is in no sense a cultural artefact, but is common to all cultures. Far from being the expression of inherited values and attitudes, mentalese is the expression of chemical and electrical activity in the brain. We can assume that it makes use of symbols for concepts, and that these symbols can be arranged in a vast variety of sequences. It may even, in the case of English-speakers, make occasional use of features of that language, and if we consciously try to grapple with our thought at this level then some isolated features do

in fact translate themselves into our native language. But it is a translation - indeed, the whole process of being able to speak a particular language is perhaps best seen as the ability to translate into that language the activity that occurs in mentalese. (Cf. Pinker 1994). In normal circumstances, by our second year of life we all have at least one language into which this translation can be made.

This has two significant implications. The first is that it is likely that mentalese, not being language-specific, has strong similarities the world over, and that the Inuit-speaker's mentalese is not vastly different from that of the Tamil-speaker. It is, after all, a response prompted by a human instinct, rather than a cultural phenomenon. The second implication is that, just as the development in the individual of one language capable of expressing mentalese has proved to be of extreme importance to our species, the development of a second or subsequent language in the same individual is not necessarily so crucial in terms of survival. This becomes particularly significant in the case of the adult second-language learner. In the first instance it seems logical that a given language must be partly learned, even when we are children. It involves sharing a code with others, and this code is necessarily a flexible one, and liable to change. Pinker argues persuasively for the need for that code to remain flexible, rather than innate and therefore immutable:

> Rather than selecting for a completely innate grammar, which would soon fall out of register with everyone else's, evolution may have given children an ability to learn the variable parts of a language as a way of synchronising their grammars with that of the community. (Pinker 1994, 243)

If mentalese is common to all humans at one end of the spectrum, there is something at the other end that makes each of us different from all the rest. There are in our speech, in our letters, in our ways of understanding what others say to us, our own idiosyncrasies, typical of ourselves and conceivably of no-one else, so that our individual style is recognisable to ourselves and others. This idiosyncratic approach to language use makes poetry possible, and puns, parody and crossword puzzles clues, and I suggest that all this can be usefully seen as the result of the individual's

particular patterns of thought within the wide-ranging parameters that mentalese has to offer. Our minds are all subtly different, and behave in different ways. We all think mentalese, but each of us thinks our own slightly different version of it. I shall refer to this idiosyncratic use of mentalese as "Mohican", as each of us is the only one to use specifically that variation. This is not a private language in Wittgenstein's sense, but merely a recognition of the fact that individual variation in language use is not a coincidence or a meaningless piece of trivia - we have an intimate relationship with our language and that relationship bears, I believe, the stamp of our individuality upon it.

When we say that we know a language, what we mean is that we are able to translate our personal version of mentalese - our Mohican - into sequenced patterns of words belonging to that language, such that our ideas can be conveyed thereby to other speakers of that same language. The process also works in reverse, and we are able to decode the words of others which are similarly expressed.

The Chomskyan school of linguistics has long attempted, and with considerable and highly laudable success, to dissect language at levels which seem to the naked eye to be massively inert. Once a sentence has been set out and nailed to a Chomskyan tree, the mechanics of the structure have been laid bare but the thing itself has somehow been bled of its essence. It is like pulling a flower apart, or a poem, or a symphony. What botanical dissection can not show us, however, is the force that through the green fuse drives the flower - the whole is so much more than the sum of its parts. If it were otherwise, then communication would be far simpler, and correspondingly far less flexible and inventive.

We can agree with Saussure on "the arbitrariness of the sign" or, as Pinker expresses it,

> the wholly conventional pairing of a sound with a meaning. The word dog does not look like a dog, walk like a dog, or woof like a dog, but it means 'dog' just the same. (Pinker 1984, 83).

The adult second-language learner has the task of remembering and accepting that from now on equally arbitrary signs such as *perro*, *chien*, and *Hund* are also going to mean *dog*, and that the rest of the universe will also be arbitrarily renamed. The word is the quintessential symbol, charged with the meaning that the members of a given language community choose to give it.

What makes language come alive, however, is that it makes "infinite use of finite media", as Humboldt reminds us. So new ideas can be expressed - not only colourless green ideas but also jokes and puns and clashing symbols, those aspects of live language use that refuse to be pinned down for dissection and which Lecercle calls "the remainder" - all those things that are left after the analysis has been performed and which make the creative use of language the miraculous wonder that it is.

As Lee reminds us, for Saussure any individual language

> ... constitutes a system of interrelated terms, such that the 'value' of any linguistic term derives from its relationship to all the other terms in the system. This is a fundamental principle of the structural approach to language. The major consequence of this argument is that the terms in one system are not commensurable with those in another, that different languages 'carve up' reality in different ways.... the fact that our native language operates with a set of terms that stand in a highly structured set of relationships to each other is clearly vital to our understanding of the process by which our experience of the world is constructed and encoded. (Lee 1992, 46-7.)

It is time to return to the notion that different languages carve up reality in different ways. At one level it is a seductive idea and, I believe, a true one, but it can also be misleading. The trap lies in the assumption that a) reality is the sum total of all the various aspects of the world that we individually and collectively classify as real, and that b) it is the same for the speakers of all languages. Clearly, however, Welsh and Hopi have not evolved as languages designed to express identical realities or aspects

of reality. The twin faculties of language to refer to aspects of reality and to evoke their meaning come together when an individual uses a given language with a given aim.

Every language allows the user to examine the elements that make up the total available potential data, and we as language users select, foreground and combine these elements. However, long before individual users arrive on the linguistic scene, the language itself has similarly made certain aspects of reality comparatively more accessible and expressible than others. It is this pre-selection, built into the circuitry of a given language, which suggests the part played by that language in perpetuating the differences in world image that were explored by Whorf:

> Each different tongue offers its own denial of determinism. 'The world', it says, 'can be other'. Ambiguity, polysemy, opaqueness, the violation of grammatical and logical sequences, reciprocal incomprehensions, the capacity to lie - these are not pathologies of language but the roots of its genius. (Steiner 1975, 235.)

It is a far cry from this to the strictly utilitarian view of language use as expressed in the container theory, according to which language acts as a mere vehicle for transferring meanings from the mind of the speaker to the addressee. The meanings that are transferred in this process have essentially the same form in the minds of the sender and the receiver when communication has taken place. (Reddy 1979, Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 11-13; Moore and Carling 1982, 149-75; Lakoff 1987, 67-74.) The essential role of the *interpreter,* however, is not hard to see. Few people would take "Wet paint" to be a request rather than a warning, but to a neutral, unprejudiced eye - deprived, that is, of any physical and cultural context for the words - it could perfectly well be so. The fact is that in normal language usage the receiver is not unprejudiced as to probable meaning - the context primes one for understanding.

If our study of the atomic level of language use fails to account for everything that is going on, we should examine the language at the level of its molecular structure. The grammar, or rule-book of a given language game, is a system which allows for the

proliferation of molecular variety. The finite number of words that a language employs can be combined and recombined in molecular structures whose properties are quite different from those of their elements. The immediately obvious consequence of this is the vast scope that language suddenly acquires. The second consequence is that, as the grammar which holds the molecular structure together in stable and legitimate formations is in itself a code, it is therefore something other than a synonym for the process of cognition. Language and world-view may well be closely entwined, but they are not inseparable from one another. Indeed, as this study is devoted to the experience of those who have studied at least one language in addition to their native tongue, the introduction of a second language into the repository of skills of an adult learner will be seen to have implications for the learner's world-view, above all on that area which most closely relates to the learner herself. In the process of acquiring a second language, the learner is laying down, on top of an established linguistic capability, a second or third layer of potential meaning and significance.

The notion of such overlap is already of importance in the native language - punning and word-games which rely for their effect upon the incongruous juxtaposition of words or meaning are a feature of normal language usage, and made possible by some aspect of the ways in which linguistic items are stored. (Culler, 1988) Such progress as we as individual learners are able to make towards bilingualism will also allow for the laying down of additional layers of meaning. Whether or not the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis holds good, if Freud is right and word association has a place in psychological insights, then the punning nature of such insights is necessarily language-specific - the mind cannot be aware of connections in unknown languages. Even if thought does not happen in language, it happens through language in some way, if only because our language is a metaphor derived from our own experience.

This duality or, indeed, multiplicity of interpretation depends upon the context in which language is used, and a fundamental part of that context is the language user. A central feature of human thought and human cognition is the ability to see the same thing from different points of view. In visual terms, these different viewpoints occur sequentially. We are all familiar with the Gestalt illustration in which what we are

seeing can be interpreted either as two faces or a candlestick. What we are unable to do, however, is to interpret that illustration in both ways at the same time. It appears to us to be one or the other, even after we have recognised both possible interpretations. Language appears to work somewhat differently. Pun, and to a far greater extent, metaphor, operate at both levels simultaneously, and we are aware of both. Indeed, I believe we are aware of the one because we are aware of the other. Ortony makes sense of this:

> The extreme non-constructivist position is that cognition is understanding things in the way that they are, whereas the extreme constructivist position is that the notion of alternative ways of seeing is fundamental to cognition. So if metaphors are important because of their ability to provide alternative or new ways of 'seeing', then so-called literal language may be too restricted because of its inability to provide those perspectives; and consequently, approaches that attribute to literal language a privileged status vis-à-vis its access to reality will have to be regarded as essentially incorrect. (Ortony, 1979, 14)

Moreover, the human context within which language operates is a key factor in its interpretation:

> ...language and situation are not conceptual autonomies but rather interdependent: they operate simultaneously, reflecting a speaker's construal of a situation and potentially defining it for other participants. How friends or spouses talk to one another not only reflects the status of their relationship, but also quite clearly constitutes it.... (Giles and Coupland 1991, 26.)

It is important to remember throughout that language does not operate in a vacuum, but that is a method of communication, and communication is not a system which allows for success without effort, as the conduit metaphor would suggest. It is a system which can only work through the expenditure of considerable amounts of

energy, and through the maintenance of a communicative tension or engagement between the interlocutors. Far from being a conduit through which meaning flows, language use is more exactly a kind of cognitive web, formed most frequently as the result of active collusion between interlocutors, as Slobin suggested above.

This is at one and the same time the great strength of language as a method of communication, and its great weakness as an accurate representation of the world. It enables us to share ideas with one another, and in the process it obliges us to focus on particular communicable aspects of relevant reality. It relies on our possession (real or potential, in the case of the child) of conceptual categories, to which we can assign, with the minimum of discrepancy, aspects of our human experience. Our use of language allows us to superimpose a structure, not upon the world but upon our perceptions of the world. In the process, it ceases to be a mirror purporting to reflect reality and, indeed, demands a level of symbolic abstraction rather than accurate representation of the world. (Steiner 1985, Lee 1992, Pinker 1994).

It is tempting to view the second language as a metaphor for the native tongue, not least because it questions the assumptions about reality that have been received through and strengthened by this symbolic abstraction as performed through the idiosyncrasies of a given language. In social contexts, language works as a dependent and an independent variable, as it both reflects and determines our social reality. However tempting this may be, it remains a mistake to equate the native language with reality and any second or subsequent language with a paler version of the same. They both seek to interpret reality. Part of the discomfort which accompanies the process of learning a second language is no more than an intensification of the normal frustrations inherent in mother-tongue use - namely the inadequacy of language to encompass certain aspects of experience: there is what Steiner termed

> ...an almost bodily discomfort at the disparity between the uniqueness, the novelty of ... emotions and the worn coinage of words. It is almost intolerable that needs, affections, hatreds, introspections which we feel to be overwhelmingly our own, which

> shape our awareness of identity and the world, should have to be voiced...in the vulgate. (Steiner, 1975, 175)

These frustrations, though common to us all as part of the experience of language use, carry with them a private significance which has much to do with who we are, or who we feel ourselves to be. But there are other factors involved. The human mind seems to have a compulsive tendency to divide the phenomena of experience into neatly differentiated compartments. These phenomena are perceived and evaluated through differentiated senses. The greater the sensory input, the greater the need for fragmentation, which increases the cognitive load and thereby, after a certain optimum point is reached, creates problems rather than solving them. By performing this division the mind allows certain aspects of these phenomena to be backgrounded, and others foregrounded so as to receive attention. As a result of this, experience becomes more manageable. Language lends itself to this process only so far, due both to the problems inherent in classification, and also to the heterogeneous nature of language itself.

It will be helpful here to distinguish between the functional aspects of language as a system permitting the communication of ideas and feelings, and the usage of language, by which I mean the metaphorical overlays which allow degrees of subtlety and variation over and above the basic communicative system. It is theoretically possible - though relatively uncommon in practice - to make use of language without straying into metaphor. However, this sentence serves to exemplify just how difficult this is. In this sentence there is the metaphor of language as a tool, (to be made use of), and as a terrain, (into which it is possible to stray). I propose, therefore, to dedicate some time to an appreciation of language as a functional system, and consider the uses to which it is naturally put, and then to address the enormously important concern of metaphorical language use which is fundamental to communication in mother-tongue. It will prove also to be highly significant in the acquisition of the second language.

Theories of language teaching have traditionally divided language use into four areas of skill, two of which are productive (speaking and writing) and two receptive

(listening and reading). If we consider them from the point of view of the chronology of their appearance in the child, we find that speaking and listening naturally emerge at an earlier stage of development than do reading and writing. It is instructive to examine these natural pairs together, rather than try to force them apart artificially. When we consider the exchange of ideas or information through speech, we must remember that no two human beings share an identical associative context. This is so because in every case the associative context is made up of the totality of the individual's existence. It therefore comprehends the sum of personal memory and experience, and the reservoir of the individual subconscious, and many of these points of reference are significantly different from person to person. However much communication occurs within the parameters of accepted conventions of grammar, and of a shared vocabulary, it remains true that within this public use of language there remains the penumbra of individual association. It has been argued that this private conceptualisation of precise meaning is as individual as a fingerprint:

> Much of this content is irreducibly individual and, in the common sense of the term, private. When we speak to others we speak 'at the surface' of ourselves. We normally use a shorthand beneath which there lies a wealth of subconscious, deliberately concealed or declared associations so extensive and intricate that they probably equal the sum and uniqueness of our status as an individual person. (Steiner, 1975, 172.)

Communication, then, permits the evocation of meaning between two or more interlocutors, and it does so despite the fact that each individual is operating within a personalised context of experience and meaning, a literal *self*-expression. The context of experience is not merely to do with the external and internal worlds, but necessarily to do with the individual understanding of language, and, over and above that understanding, with the individual relationship to the mother tongue. As the apparently smooth surface of communication hides the differences of context and engagement with the language that is in use, Humboldt was able to observe that 'all understanding is at the same time a misunderstanding, all agreement in thought and

feeling is also a parting of the ways.' In other words, language may reduce, but can not eliminate, the degree to which it is impossible ever to know another person.

Communication, then, is essentially problematic. Not only are the interlocutors using language to refer on occasion to subtly different areas of experience, and doing so in the context of their own relationship with their native tongue, but the initial fact remains that language is an instrument of categorisation and selection. These two aspects are of equal importance. Firstly, linguistic categories are not immovably fixed, nor are they universally agreed upon. Secondly, the selection of the lexical and syntactical elements with a discourse or text is a unilateral process, often undertaken with more speed than precision, and always subject to the terms of reference of the speaker. It has been argued that language operated as a container for meaning; that a self-contained and interpretable meaning was somehow placed into a text by a speaker, conveyed by means of the expression of this text to a listener, and then extracted or unloaded, without alteration or misinterpretation, by that listener. The analogy, according to this line of argument, is with a code, in which the symbols can only have one possible meaning each, and in which a knowledge of the value of each part of the encryption system is sufficient to decode the entire message. More attractive still is the knowledge that, in the case of a coded system, it is enough to know indisputably the meaning of some parts of the system in order to be able to deduce the rest. After all, something very similar appears to happen in language use - despite the presence of background noise, we do not need to hear every syllable as it is spoken in order to understand the message that we are being given.

However, to interpret this as evidence to support the notion that language operates as a container, that all the listener has to do is to unpack the message and take out what was placed into it by the speaker, is to ignore the necessarily subjective contribution made at every stage in the communicative process by the hearer or the reader when they bring their own knowledge and experience to bear upon the message. In point of fact, the speaker and the listener are both very involved in the transaction. In the case of speech, at least, the listener is constantly refining a series of hypotheses about the speaker's intended meaning. A great deal could be at stake, and it is important that as

accurate a picture as possible be built up in the listener's mind. [3] So, it appears that we hear what we expect to hear. The process of semantic priming which allows us to perform in this way not only make it possible for us to supply the missing words without realising that we are doing so, but to do so correctly and at speed. Speed is an important factor when we are considering speech, and one of the most familiar sensations for the learner of a second language, and one which is frequently reported by the adult learners interviewed in this survey, is the feeling that foreigners somehow talk faster than we do, and that our understanding lags behind because of the sheer speed of delivery.

The effect of semantic priming means that lexical decision times were faster for a word such as *"nurse"*, if this word had been preceded by another word related to it in meaning or association, such as *"doctor"*, or *"patient"* (Mayer and Schvaneveldt 1971). Indeed, polysemous words such as *"patient"* require an unequivocal context if they are to be interpreted at all. Recognition times are demonstrably slower for words that bear no obvious associative connotations, such as *"doctor"*, *"fish"*, *"table"*, and so on. (Forster, in Osherson and Lasnik, 1990, 102.) This priming effect is extremely strong, and extremely reliable. It appears to allow some kind of selective access to our lexical store, such that when a context word is supplied our access system becomes sensitised particularly to other words related in some way to the context word. This system allows us to remain aware of what we are talking about, and to relate one piece of information to those that have been previously received. When we exploit some of the richness of that system, we produce metaphor. When we are careless with it, we produce "garden path" sentences, and when we play with it we are able to create new and unexpected contextual relationships which form the basis of punning and jokes which rely upon word-play for their success. The system is a highly sophisticated one, and has implications for the learner of a second language, not least when trying to establish a context for received utterances in the target language, and when endeavouring to avoid the pitfalls caused by homophones.

[3] Guesswork is routinely used, if a clear context is provided. Aitchison (1987) describes experiments in which the last word of a sentence was played indistinctly to listeners, who were asked to report what they had heard. The sentence "Paint the fence and the ?ate." was heard as ending with the word "gate", while "Check the calendar and the ?ate." was reported to end with "date", and "Here's the fishing gear and the ?ate." led to people hearing "bait" as the final word.

The difficulty experienced by a second-language learner can be recreated to some extent by reducing or eliminating altogether the context from within which meaning can be deciphered. The listener is now forced to rely entirely on guesswork. The results can be quite bizarre. [4]

Cole (1980) and Aitchison (1987) emphasise the importance of such contexts in establishing frameworks as an essential factor in the recreation of meaning. The semantic priming effect, however, is not limited to vocabulary alone. As suggested above, careless use of this effect can lead us in the direction of garden path sentences, such as *"The cotton shirts are made from comes from India,"* in which we have to revise our understanding of what the sentence is about when we reach the verb *"comes"*. In this case it is the structure of the sentence which leads us astray. Syntax can also operate in similar fashion, by preselecting one facet of a polysemous word, as in *"Time flies like an arrow but fruit flies like bananas"*. It is plain from these examples that it is not enough to claim that meaning is somehow deposited into a text and later extracted from it. To suggest that is to ignore the indirect nature of the relationship between text and meaning, and, what is at least as serious, this approach fails to recognise the crucial importance of the work of deciphering done by the listener in order to bring about a reconstruction of meaning. The implications of all this for the learner of a second language are of considerable significance.

Firstly, the semantic priming effect which operates in mother-tongue can only serve to prime the individual with known words. When such priming occurs in the second language, two things occur. Unless the known relevant vocabulary in the second language is roughly equal to that in mother-tongue, the priming stimulus will evoke fewer second-language terms - there will be gaps. These gaps will either remain as gaps, or be filled with mother-tongue terms, which increases the risk of interference.

---

[4] Reddy (1976) asked native English-speakers to listen to the admittedly improbable utterance 'In mud eels are, in clay none are', and reported a variety of reconstructive hypotheses, among them:
In muddies sar in clay nanar. In my deals are in clainanar.
In my ders en clain. In model sar in claynanar.

Secondly, an incomplete priming of lexical items both mirrors and points to an incomplete contextual framework within which the utterance can be interpreted, thereby complicating the process of comprehension, and slowing it down when it does occur. Also relevant to our discussion is the suggestion that one element involved in the business of speech perception relies upon the listener in some way

> ....figuring out how he or she would produce the same sounds. Although this theory is not universally accepted, it is of interest to our discussion, for it suggests that finely controlled motor sequences may be an inseparable part of our language communication system, in terms of both production and perception. (Springer and Deutsch, 1989, 307.)

Conflicting views of speech perception lay varying degrees of stress on the importance of these aspects of motor behaviour. Liberman's (1974) motor theory argues that perception is based on the ability to pronounce speech ourselves, that only humans can perceive the phonetic structures within a sentence, and that this perception is part of our biological heritage as humans.

In contrast to all this is the auditory theory of speech perception, which is not identified with any single researcher, but which finds experimental support in Miller, 1990. According to the auditory theory, perception is not based on any motor response, but the auditory system is enough on its own; perception is not species-specific, although the interpretation of human sounds by humans is not likely to find parallels elsewhere. Perception is, according to this theory, innate, and operating from a very early age.

All theories agree that words in any language are phonic, auditory objects, which can be grouped into specific parts-of-speech categories. They possess meaning, although many words are polysemous and not all users of a given word understand its meaning in precisely the same way, and furthermore the meaning of a word is not an isolated independent thing - it casts a penumbra of its own and operates within the penumbra of other words which form its context. The vocabulary of any language is made up of

clusters of words associated within meaning systems, hence the possibility of - and the need for - semantic priming (*"climb"* selects *"mountain"*, but *"octopus"* does not), without which retrieval would be an inordinately lengthy process.

The learner of a second language, by definition, already possesses a mother tongue, in which it is possible and normal, through semantic priming, to discount 99% of known vocabulary as irrelevant to the present context. Within what is left, the context constrains the possibilities of meaning, while still leaving room for flexibility of intention and of meaning. This is what allows the listener to focus on the remaining 1%, and it makes for ease and speed of comprehension. However, in the context of a second language that is in the process of being learned, this ability to operate within a given context or register is so severely limited that our mother-tongue ability can not begin to operate. We react, especially when it comes to listening, as though selectional restriction did not apply, and the ability of language to convey meaning becomes severely constrained.

To consider writing, we must return for a moment to the earlier distinction that I made between different aspects of language use as being either primary or secondary skills. Not only is writing a secondary skill *per se*, it is also a second-order symbolic system, in that the marks on paper represent language, not reality. However, written language is much more than simply speech written down. Not only does it have its own conventions, but it also serves as an independent means of communication which in the modern world often supersedes the oral. For people who have become accustomed to the relative impersonality of writing as a means of communication, a reversion to oral communication when a new language is being learned can serve as an additional cause for unease.

We learn to place trust in the written form of language, which has the additional virtue of holding ideas still for as long as may prove necessary. Speech, on the other hand, is ephemeral. Speech in another language is not only ephemeral, but also less familiar and, apparently, faster and thus less accessible. The gaps between words that we are able to imagine when we hear our own language are suddenly not there any longer when the language shifts into Spanish or French. We therefore find ourselves,

paradoxically, in a situation in which the most natural use of language - the spoken word - becomes threatening and inhibiting to the learner in ways that the written word does not.

If it is an advantage to the learner that the written language holds ideas still, it is at the same time a source of potential threat. Receptive use of the written word is relatively easy. Productive use - writing correctly in the target language - is correspondingly challenging. Once our own ideas are held on the page, they can be subject to grammatical scrutiny. As a result, the notion of 'grammaticality' tends to reinforce the notion of 'right' - and therefore of 'wrong' - usage. Moreover, the concrete nature of the written sentence also confirms the idea of language as an object. Writing reifies, and preserves the ephemeral for long enough to allow an evaluation of the 'rightness' or otherwise of a structure.

Beyond the question of externalised expression through a given language, whether in written or oral form, there is the matter of what we intuitively speak of as "thinking in" a particular language. It seems that because we express our thoughts in a particular tongue, that we assume ourselves to have been thinking in that same tongue. Whorf had no doubt about this, and summed up his thinking in one of his last papers:

> Actually, thinking is most mysterious, and by far the greatest light upon it that we have is thrown by the study of language. This study shows that the forms of a person's thoughts are controlled by inexorable laws of pattern of which he is unconscious. These patterns are the unperceived intricate systematisations of his own language - shown readily enough by a candid comparison and contrast with other languages, especially those of a different linguistic family. His thinking itself is in a language - in English, in Sanskrit, in Chinese. And every language is a vast pattern-system, different from others, in which are culturally ordained the forms and categories by which the personality not only communicates, but also analyses nature, notices or neglects types of relationship and

> phenomena, channels his reasoning, and builds the house of his consciousness.
> (Whorf, 1956, 252.)

Miller has reservations about this, however, and suggests:

> ....it may be that only part of the language which is being employed for thinking in general is used for acquiring the language which we actually express our thoughts in; the rest of it is being used for other aspects of thinking, which don't necessarily enter consciousness.
> (Miller 1983, 94)

One of the problems facing the early learner of a second language is the requirement of performing two challenging tasks simultaneously. The first is the (self-)conscious task of thinking about what the speaker wishes to say in the target language - the selection and marshalling of syntax and vocabulary - and the second is an equally (self-)conscious attempt at correct transmission. Thinking about something is a *task* for which language is clearly used. Such thought frequently takes the form of an internal monologue, or even an internal dialogue. Indeed, concentrated thought which is focused on a task has much in common with speech. In contrast to this, the process of merely thinking as an *activity*, operates apparently at a level below that of conscious language use.

However, if the semantic priming effect is operating, there is no justification for claiming that the form of thought and the form of the resultant speech are one and the same. Indeed, the result of semantic priming is to activate far more lexical and syntactical items than are eventually used. The language of thought and the language of speech must, under these conditions, be distinct from one another. Miller's observations address the adult situation, rather than what happens in childhood, with the earlier stages of linguistic and intellectual development. Vygotsky, as ever, is especially illuminating on this point:

> Up to a certain stage, we can trace the pre-intellectual growth of the child's speech and the pre-verbal growth of his intellect. It is only later that the 2 lines of development intersect. Speech becomes intellectual, and thinking verbal. (Vygotsky 1987, 117)

This cross-over, essential in the development of the child, prepares the way for the type of problem I have just described. However intellectual speech becomes, and however verbal thinking becomes, they both have the characteristics for the most part of an automatic process. It is when they become conscious that they become more laboured. However, in the adult who is studying a second language, they necessarily do become more conscious, as we shall see in later chapters.

Related to this are questions of to what extent language is capable of expressing all thought. Arguably, there may be held to be many areas of thought, or alternatively mere quantities of thought, that escape the net cast by language and find no expression. Over and above day to day language use, poetics in particular, but also literature in general, frequently attempts to refine language, to purify the dialect of the tribe, in its efforts to capture vastly numinous subjects that hardly lend themselves to verbal constraint. There are certain orders of experience which may always resist total expression in words. The native speaker will always be able to find those areas of experience difficult if not impossible to sum up in words.

Similarly, the learner of a new language will find throughout the initial stages a vast mis-match between the levels of cognitive awareness and linguistic control, and this discrepancy can cause considerable frustration and unease. When it comes to receptive use of the target language, while it is the case that in our native language the processes that underlie language comprehension are largely unconscious, as our impression as listeners is one of immediate automatic recognition and these processes do not even require our undivided attention, the situation again alters radically when the language in use is no longer our native tongue. The language that appeared to flow as a single stream of interpretable sound appears fragmented, divided arbitrarily into those parts that we seem to recognise and those whose meaning we try grimly to discover. Another strand of difficulty has now been woven into the problem - because

the flow of the target language is not perceived as seamless, the mind focuses less on the overall pattern and rather on the fractured components. However, "an essential element in creative thinking and effective problem solving is the ability to perceive and think in terms of wholes or patterns rather than isolated parts." (Frager and Fadiman, 1984) So long as we remain unable to detect the patterns, our use of language both productive and receptive is constrained and uneasy. The body of knowledge which is transmissible through language study is rigidly constrained by syntax. While it is true that this constraint on the form of utterance allows infinite flexibility of its content and of the ideas that we can express through it, until such time as we have mastered the syntax, the freedom of expression is necessarily limited.

Pinker reminds us that it is enough to examine language in any slightly unusual aspect in order to reveal the complexity of what we habitually take so much for granted.:

> Watch an immigrant struggling with a second language or a stroke patient with a first one, or deconstruct a snatch of baby talk, or try to program a computer to understand English, and ordinary speech begins to look different. The effortlessness, the transparency, the automaticity are illusions, masking a system of great richness and beauty. (Pinker 1994, 21)

The observation is exact. Familiarity with our own native tongue, once achieved, is all-pervasive. The need to express an idea verbally will lead to an automatic response in the language we feel to be our own, and this interference from the mother-tongue long remains a feature of the learner's interlanguage. (Selinker, 1972, 1992.) Also, the evidence for semantic priming is strong. The question then arises as to what precisely happens in the mind of someone who is able to communicate in more than a single language. How does the acquisition of a new lexicon take place? Where is it stored? are new items simply added to the old lexical store, or is a new storehouse somehow opened up? Does semantic priming work across languages, so that a search for "basta" habitually evokes "bastard"? Alternatively, the old Gestalt problem resurfaces - do we see a word as either English or Spanish, for example? Can we ever see it simultaneously as both? Gombrich (1983), refers to the problems of perception,

and "the relation between what one knows, what one expects, what one believes to hear and what one actually hears."

When we consider aspects of language usage rather than the problems inherent in structure, we are reminded that language is not to be seen as a mirror of pre-existing autonomous social structures, but rather as the main medium through which social processes can operate. Within this, metaphor has a vital part in the everyday production of meaning. Coding through language does not simply report reality; it also helps to create it. (Lee, 1992) When we learn our native language as children we are socialised by the metaphors current in that language into certain ways of perceiving or interpreting the world. These paths to understanding are in many cases specific to the culture and the language into which we are born. Again, this process is not a result of linguistic structure, but of usage:

> In this sense the argument here distances itself from the emphasis on the relationship between linguistic structure and perspective in the work of Saussure and Whorf. It is also important to emphasise that metaphors provide not one but a whole range of ways of structuring particular domains, so that the perspectives they offer are heterogeneous rather than homogeneous. They are also characterised by openness. As our world changes, so new metaphors come into play. (Lee, 1992, 89.)

Language activity in the brain serves both understanding and expression:

> The activity in the network can reconstruct knowledge so that a person experiences it consciously, or it can activate a system that mediates between concept and language, causing appropriately correlated word-forms and syntactical structures to be generated. Because the brain categorises perceptions and action simultaneously along many different dimensions, symbolic representations such as metaphor can easily emerge from this architecture. (Damasio et al, 1992, 65)

This is true of all language, as a metaphor for reality, as

> ....the primary function of language is formative or rhetorical, and only secondarily and in a derived way referential and representational.
> (Shotter 1989, 148.)

To review our discussion so far, the first section has addressed the relationship that exists between the realities of the world in which we live and the language with which we try to interpret, relay or even deny these realities. At the heart of the discussion, language usage rather than structure has emerged as fundamental to our ways of expressing, and insofar as the two things are inextricably linked, our ways of understanding the world.

This being so, an abrupt shift in language usage - from our native tongue, with all its familiar and dependable features, to a second and far less comfortable language - will have a profound effect upon our capacity for self-expression. We can expect such a shift to unsettle the adult learner, albeit temporarily, and will need to identify ways of minimising this effect in order to make learning easier. I now need to examine what it means to be an adult learner of language. Of particular importance to those who embark on learning a second language is the already existing relationship of adult learners to their own native language. Chapter 4 will examine the implications of this relationship, and will trace some of the stages in its development.

CHAPTER 4

THE ADULT LEARNER

The language I have learnt these forty years,
My native English, now I must forgo,
And now my tongue's use is to me no more
Than an unstringed viol or harp.
Or like a cunning instrument cas'd up -
Or being open put into his hands
That knows no touch to tune the harmony.
Within my mouth you have engaol'd my tongue,
Doubly portcullis'd with my teeth and lips,
And dull unfeeling barren ignorance
Is made my gaoler to attend on me.
I am too old to fawn upon a nurse,
Too far in years to be a pupil now.

(Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, in Richard II, Act 1 Scene3)

In the light of the observations on language that I have made in the earlier chapters, I wish now to move on to the process at the heart of my own professional work - what is it, exactly, that happens when an adult learner begins to learn a second language? At one level, the process may appear to be obvious - the learner learns to attribute meaning to new clusters of sounds and letters, and to express basic ideas within the constraints of a new linguistic code. But to conceive of the process in this way is to take an outsider's view, measuring both progress and success in terms of linguistic output alone.

Language does not operate well in a vacuum. It requires to be used, and that presupposes a social context for its use. If the language in question is our native one, the social context is potentially everywhere present, but in the case of a second or

subsequent language the opportunities for meaningful use of that language are necessarily more limited. This project does not attempt to study the situation of immigrants who are obliged by circumstances to acquire another language if they are to operate in a new society. It takes as its subject those people who are motivated by whatever private reason to take up the study of a European language, other than English, while living and frequently working in this country.

There is something slightly artificial about this. For two hours a week, through the depths of an English winter, we behave, at least at one important level, as though we thought we were living in Spain. The motivation behind this will vary from person to person, but it does require some attempt at an explanation. Who are the people who decide to behave in this way? They are unnamed throughout the study, but their names are only one aspect of their identity, and perhaps the least important. Their voices speak out clearly throughout this project, telling us who they think they are in terms of the multiple levels of society that they inhabit. There are many aspects of the use of the second or target language that begin to influence performance from the earliest contact, and they are subtly intertwined in ways that I hope to show. For many adult students, the process of beginning the study of a foreign language makes them aware - often for the first time - of language as a motor skill, involving a number of physical movements which combine to allow communication to take place.

Many adult learners have no memory of the process of learning their own language, and little more than hazy recollections of learning a second one. They are two profoundly different processes, not least because the adult learner is already in possession of a set of fully formed and developed word meanings, which simply require translation into the target language. At this level, if the concepts already exist in mother-tongue, then they can theoretically be transferred and find expression through a second or subsequent language, once the syntax and relevant vocabulary have been mastered. Herein lies the second part of the difference, as the foreign language is learned under entirely different internal and external conditions from those which operated when the native language was acquired.

The feelings of hesitancy and ineptitude which are so familiar to students of a foreign language are rooted to some degree in the fact that the production of a foreign language necessarily involves the production of foreign sounds. There is something in us which resists the public emission of alien sound, as it makes us self-conscious and uneasy. All too frequently, it is easier to think or even say "I can't do it" than it is to persevere until the right sounds emerge in the right order. This has apparently less to do with a subjective evaluation of whether a particular language sounds "pleasant" or "unpleasant", and more to do with the kind of noises that we personally feel happy to make; it is, in other words, the result of an introspection. That in turn will have a lot to do with our own language history, with what our parents and teachers considered to be an acceptable accent, and with those elements of our own makeup that we are happy or otherwise to see revealed in our speech.

The problem goes beyond the sounds, which are merely the first stage, into the whole area of oral communication. Unlike other aspects of language use, oral communication throws an unremitting, immediate and very public light on the student's performance, and this can make the student feel very ill at ease:

> ....I'm not very keen on the oral work, which is stupid because the whole point is to communicate... the oral side really bothers me, I mean I hate it, and I really am anxious about it and whenever I have an oral it just goes to pot and it's a hundred times worse than it would normally be, just because I am so worried about it. (3)[5]

At one level, our view of ourselves as competent users of language is under review, and this has to do with questions of identity. Our notion of our own identity is not something fixed and unchanging from the cradle to the grave, or even from one day to another. It is liable to constant change, a Protean phenomenon sliding over and between boundaries, sometimes reflecting, sometimes absorbing, the light that falls on it. In part it is a social construct, imposed on the individual from outside and

[5] In this and subsequent chapters, the interviewees who took part in this research are quoted, and identified by a number. Appendix 2, while preserving their anonymity, supplies a little additional information about each of them.

manifesting itself in a series of other socially-constructed behaviours, among which are language choice and variation. In part, too, it is a personal sense, an awareness of something which makes each of us different from others in ways that are somehow definable, not through an inflexible taxonomy of unalterable features, but despite the fact that each of us is constantly changing. This is a complex phenomenon, and one in which language has a part - of enormous subtlety and importance - to play.

As Giles and Coupland remind us, language "reflects and manufactures different kinds of evolving social meaning and personal and social identity in context." (Giles and Coupland, 1991, 31.) This being the case, since the language that we speak is instrumental in creating and maintaining an awareness of who we are in individual and in social terms, then any excursion into the obscure parameters and unknown syntax and lexis of a new language is potentially a cause for alarm.

Our social identity is an integrated web of immense complexity. We are aware of ourselves as belonging to a multitude of social categories, whose boundaries are shifting, and permeable, and which frequently overlap. In many ways this type of awareness is directed outwards from within, towards the social group or groups which are foregrounded by circumstances at any given moment. Thus, as a parent I operate in different ways at home and at my children's school; my opinion of that school is coloured by the fact of my profession as a teacher; as well as being someone's father I am at the same time someone's husband and someone else's son and it is therefore probable that I shall be expected, by myself as well as by others, to play a number of roles within the family arena and within a broader social context.

These are some - a minute proportion - of the facets of my social identity. The details of the social identity of others will naturally vary from person to person, but the complexity of their inter-relationship will not. At the same time as all these different performances (each of which operates within subtly different linguistic parameters) are going on in these several arenas, there is another aspect of my identity which is receiving feedback from each performance, and is concerned to evaluate them. This evaluation informs my response to my performance in each arena, my willingness to repeat the experience or to avoid any future repetition. Those areas where I feel that I

have not performed well are the areas in which I am relatively reluctant to perform again. An inescapable part of the process of learning a language is the process of making mistakes and learning from having made them and, as the public performance of target-language use necessarily involves error, then the ways in which error is received and evaluated become an important consideration in encouraging or inhibiting adult students in the continuation of their studies.

This is the side of my identity which feeds on success and failure, feels elated or insecure, and not only derives these feelings as a result of outward performance but is at the same time capable of letting them influence the performance itself. My interaction with myself is extremely complex, and one of the characteristic features of this interaction at every level is the involvement of language.

If Shakespeare's Thomas Mowbray is looking with horror on a future in which his language will be denied him, it is because language is a fundamental part of our identity. This is so in the formative periods of our lives, as it is through language that we enter on the early exploratory stages of our relationship with the world, and, indeed, throughout all subsequent learning experiences, but it is not only significant then. It remains of enormous importance throughout our lives, as we use language to express ourselves and operate at every level of our external and internal interactions.

Fortunately, most of those who learn a new language are inspired by circumstances other than banishment in order to do so. Being deprived of one's own language is, of course, a terrible thing, but there need be nothing terrible about learning to express oneself in a different language. It involves problems of its own, not least the feeling of being, as one adult student reports, "slowed down by the need to marshal words into the right order" (5), but it has its compensations.

Evans reminds us of the power of the learning process to help in the creation of a new aspect of our identity - a new skill mastered - and that this can be achieved if necessary without first-hand experience of the country or of the culture concerned. Not only that, but

> The words will not have the same depth or resonance, but they will be in some sense innocent, fresh, free of all the accretions which characterise the words of the mother tongue, *les mots de la tribu.* (Evans, 1988, 79)

That is looking on the bright side. Harder points out that language learning necessarily involves the problems which I equate with Mowbray's "dull unfeeling barren ignorance', but that this can soon be left behind as the learner begins to accept and take on a temporary linguistic identity. There is good reason to expect that this will appear inept and rudimentary at the beginning of the process, but it will improve with time. As Harder puts it: "in order to be a wit in a foreign language you have to go through the stage of being a half-wit - there is no other way."(Harder, 1980, 269)

There is no other way. That is fair enough on the face of it, and may well be true, but it offers small comfort to any learners whose self-belief is at all shaky, or whose confidence in their relationship with their own native tongue leaves anything to be desired. The process of becoming a half-wit, finding yourself suddenly infantilised to such a degree that you can only say what a teacher has recently taught you, and even that imperfectly and without any real conviction, is not in essence a comfortable one. After all, linguistic performance is not a private skill but a public one. It is permanently open to the scrutiny of the tutor and other members of the learning group, but it is also a skill which sooner or later is liable to be examined publicly, by people who are not members of the learning group. It is easy to forget how daunting this can be:

> I knew that there was going to be a black hole and somebody was going to ask me a question and my answer - or my silence - was going to be recorded. That was very, very frightening. (1)

From a subjective point of view, the second or subsequent language that one learns differs from one's native tongue, as much as anything in that it has a different relationship to the learner's experience of the world, the cognitive map. It forms a less integral part of that experience, is chronologically a comparatively late thread in it,

has its foundation in the learner's awareness of the first language, and reflects a sort of 'self-consciousness' of deliberate use of the target language.

In trying to overcome some learned aspects of interference from our native language we might be facing nothing more than a behavioural problem, with our mother tongue always struggling to come out in preference to any other. After all, for almost an entire lifetime the learner has had positive feedback about the use of the native language as a means of communication, and, within the parameters of that language, particular attention has been given to the pronunciation of words in contextualised use. It comes as no surprise, then, that the native language should emerge as an immediate and automatic vehicle for oral communication, or that within that language it should be especially difficult to give a foreign (i.e. alien, not part of one's self) value to the sounds of a word that looks identical in the target language. In other words, if it has always been right to pronounce "particular", "natural" etc. in accordance with the local contextualised norms operating in the native language, it is doubly challenging to invest these clusters of letters with Spanish values, a process which involves not only changes in sound but also in intonation.

> If you ask me a question in Spanish, I have to think of the answer in English before I can give the Spanish.
> Q.> *You rehearse the answer first in English, or you let it form...?*
> A.> I let it form, not rehearsing word for word... but the idea is formed in English before it comes out in Spanish... (7)

Alternatively, it might be that the mind allows us to operate in our first language unless and until it is forcibly required to do otherwise. The amount of forcing that becomes necessary will depend on our familiarity with the alternative language, but there must be always a decision, conscious or unconscious, as well as a controlling mechanism, which allows us to operate in a given language at any one time. If not, polyglots would jumble everything up. Other things being equal, there may be a kind of linguistic inertia at work - the choice, once made, to express ourselves through our native language, leads to continued use of that language until something happens to force a change. Similarly, the decision to use our second language may be enough to

generate further use of that language until we run out of ways to say whatever we want to say:

> I don't think in English, but I think at the beginning of a sentence how I'm going to end it... the sentence will automatically follow on, grammatically, I hope, and people are able to understand. I'm not sure, if I plunge into a Spanish sentence without thinking, that I'm going to get myself out at the other end. So I tend to think of the whole thing as a finished sentence, which you never do in English. It's only very well-known phrases that I suddenly think Oh! I said that in Spanish without even thinking about it in English... (10)[6]

However, the problem is not merely one of content. Guiora (1972) also believes that learning a language means being able to take on a new identity and to accept 'modification of one of the basic modes of identification by the self and others, the way we sound.' The first time we hear a recording of our own voices we tend to disown them as not "sounding right" - in other words, as not forming part of our own concept of our identity. It is not that the voice sounds unpleasant, necessarily, or alien, or negative in any way, but merely that it does not coincide with our long-standing knowledge of how that voice sounds when we hear it from the inside, as it resonates through the bone and the hollow spaces of our skull. We have heard it all our lives, and believe we know what it sounds like. By virtue of its suddenly not sounding right, we reject it as part of our selves. For one who is learning to speak a foreign language, not only has the rest of the world been suddenly and arbitrarily renamed, but this renaming is likely to have embraced brutal new sounds that the learner must now attempt to master, but has never been called upon to make before, and that frequently can not be made automatically. They must be learned. In order for them to be learned, they must be deemed to be acceptable.

[6] Interestingly, there is implicit the apparent delusion that mother-tongue speech invariably emerges in grammatically well-structured sentences, and that native speakers of another language will only understand us if we organize our use of their language along similar lines.

For one male student, who identifies strongly with German, the sounds of Spanish were a serious stumbling-block to his learning:

> ....For years I'd had a mental block about Spanish. Because of the lisp. Spanish always sounded a little fey.
> Q.> *Do you still see it as a fey language?*
> A.> No, not now. I see it now as part of the language structure ...that's the way the sounds go. I think it's a lovely language. I like the sound of it... I must have got over that in my own mind. (1)

It is almost as though the faculty of speech were having to be reacquired, despite its continuing simultaneously to exist in a familiar, comforting, and comparatively adequate form. For the learner struggling with the demands of a new language there is above all the matter of communication in public to consider, a concern which is frequently connected with a critical self-consciousness when it comes to performance. Fluency and accuracy are sometimes seen as unattainable extremes of a continuum, with the learner having to settle for an acceptable level of either the one or the other:

> I would far rather speak terrible Spanish with an excellent accent if I could be understood, than to speak grammatically perfect Spanish but still sound like an English person speaking Spanish... (12)

There is clearly a wish here to fit in with speakers of the target language, to immerse oneself in a new forum in which one's English identity is less immediately obvious. Guiora goes on to suggest that as a speaker of a foreign language, 'partially and temporarily one gives up one's separateness of identity'. At one level this does not seem to me to be at all what is happening, indeed, the whole experience of finding oneself at the mercy of a foreign language can highlight our extreme individual isolation. It is, perhaps, rather our individual uniqueness, insofar as it is expressed or expressible through language, which is being backgrounded. The spotlight can then fall on our relationship to our own language:

> The people who are better than I am... I think they're more intelligent, and I think that some of them have a much better background in English and English grammar... many others will have used correct English more than I would....(6)

What is true, however, is that by abandoning the use of our native language, we automatically deprive ourselves of the opportunity for self-expression through it. It may well be that I normally express some aspects of who I am through my native English, and that by choosing to express them in that way - assuming it to be a choice rather than a necessity - I seek and normally find a common badge of identity with other English speakers. At the same time I am admittedly concealing others, and being assessed all the while by my interlocutors irrespective of the personae that I attempt to present or conceal in my use of my native tongue.

By using another language I abandon such aspects of my expressible identity as are inextricably caught up in my mother tongue, and underline my individual and cultural separateness by studying yet another language that the majority of mankind do not know. I do not do this in a vacuum. I do it by joining a cultural sub-group, which acquires a collective identity of its own - the Monday evening Spanish group, for instance.

It is by focusing on the existence and composition of a learning group that we can understand a little more of the language-learning process in adult learners. More perhaps than many other subject areas, the study of a language breaks down what is often intuitively felt to be a tension between, on the one hand, a communicable body of knowledge with a corresponding array of practical objective skills, and on the other, the creative, affective engagement of the learner in the learning situation. (Knights, 1992) The learning group is the forum within which the dynamics between the cognitive and the affective aspects of a learning process are given full expression, and where they can be studied as well as experienced. Talking, after all, is very much a social thing. It is, almost by definition, *the* thing that people do, regardless of where they happen to be, who they are, or who they are with. In the nature of things it would seem that a group is the place to learn a language.

However, groups are things which have a life of their own, as we shall see in greater detail in Chapter 5. Or rather, they acquire a recognisable life of their own, after a number of developmental stages. The first time that a group meets is not an easy time, as it engages the group members in a series of tensions, many of which have to do with their private hopes and fears. These hopes and fears, in turn, embrace aspects of the participants' self-image. That is a truism of human encounters - they all share a potential for concealment or disclosure - not always voluntary - of what we perceive to be our strengths and weaknesses. What is virtually unique in the case of a class concerning language is that the arbitrary and provisional nature of meaning tends to be demonstrated here as in few other places. We behave in our everyday lives as though words and the things to which they refer were in some significant way conjoined. If we were to question this fusion, we might well feel alarm and unease, but few of our students do question it. They come to their language classes sharing a comfortable and widespread belief in the accuracy, stability and lack of ambiguity inherent in normal language use, and they can feel immensely threatened by its sudden disappearance.

Members of a language-learning group make clear efforts to avoid the process of being infantilised, of being stripped of their linguistic power and returned to a time in their lives before they were on equal terms with adults who were able to invest power in themselves because they manipulated language successfully. Among the strategies that are adopted we find attempts to appear to be "good at" the target language by trying to predict the likely question, and preparing that answer to the exclusion of all else, while studiously avoiding eye contact with the tutor while questions are being asked of the class as a whole; settling for high levels of interference from the mother tongue in their use of the target language, especially when it comes to accent; and, if all else fails, dropping out and finding reasons to be elsewhere.

As we shall see in Chapter 5, language-learning groups change in their make-up as time goes by. Frequently the change is brought about by one or more members feeling that they should withdraw and abandon their studies. This is not an uncommon feature of Further Education groups in any case, and can happen at any time during the

life of the group. What does vary, however, is the effect that these withdrawals have at different times. In the early days, while the group is still forming and before the majority of students have learned one another's names, it does not appear to give major cause for concern. The larger the group, the more this tends to be the case. Later, once the group identity has become established in the minds of its members, such defections appear at one and the same time to be a cause for personal concern and for the further cementing of the remaining students as an identifiable group of stalwart survivors.

In many ways it is the existence of the group itself, and the sense of shared identity that that provides, which becomes as important as the specific make-up of the group in any one year. If the individual ego is undergoing a bombardment of infantilisation and cognitive dissonance, there is the group to provide a feeling of sorrows shared and successes publicly displayed and celebrated, as well as providing a forum for the learning demonstrably to take place:

The group environment can be seen as a safe place, where the learner is protected from ridicule when mistakes occur. Although when it is pointed out that in real life the risks of being ridiculed are slight, the feeling is still that the group offers a real protection. One student told me of a conversation with a Spanish lady whom she had met in a park, and which had given her great satisfaction:

> It's a great feeling of achievement, when you're sitting in the park and chatting to someone who happens to be sitting next to you, and it's a great feeling of satisfaction to be able to communicate, and if it's not correct I still feel it works... one lady had a little grandson with her, and started to speak about him, and then said "Have you got any grandchildren?", and we continued from there. I got all her history, and we talked about our children, the kind of thing that two grandmas can talk about together and feel quite happy about... (6)

However, the same person observed that the class is a safe place in which to practice and make mistakes:

> ...I suppose part of it is you don't want to make a fool of yourself... although that doesn't really worry me because I think in the class nobody would say Oh, dear, she got that wrong... everybody's very supportive, so I don't think that happens...
> Q.> *And it wouldn't happen in real life either, would it? Your lady in the park...?*
> A.> No, no. No, it wouldn't, true. (6)

Part of the function of the learning group is clearly seen, by this student at least, as offering a safe forum for practice to occur, and for mistakes to be made as part of the learning process. It is an area of transition, in some ways, between the frozen horror of a tongue-tied student who finds the mind has suddenly gone blank, and the pleasure and satisfaction that arise from exchanging family gossip with a stranger, in a language which is not your own. Argyle reminds us of the basics without which none of this can happen at all:

> Language is possible only if there is a shared vocabulary. In order to talk about a particular topic, two people need to have common words for this area of activity or interest. (Argyle, 1983, 49)

This is indeed the bottom line - without the effort that has been put into the acquisition and retention of vocabulary, there is no linguistic communication possible. The acquisition of this new language is indicative of the individual's growth - it is not a social phenomenon in the first instance, but a personal one. Unlike the child, who by virtue of the process of learning language is also learning to become an apprentice to his/her own culture, the adult second-language learner is an apprentice to important aspects of the culture of others. The study of a second language is a slow excursion into a different reality. In the adult case, however, this process of acculturation involves not the Piagetian focus of cognitive development as a sequence of emerging local competencies, but rather it is a result of pragmatic and intersubjective

agreements in meaning[7] which lie at the heart of the linguistic developmental process. (See Light and Perret-Clermont , 1989, in Light et al, 1991, 148)

Yet the fear of making mistakes in public remains. In part it has to do with being an adult - adults are supposed to know the answers. As individual adults, we have a considerable emotional investment tied up with this notion. When we are made aware of our own infantilisation, of the fact that we patently do not know all the answers, at least in this new language which poses unheard-of questions, anxiety over performance increases. To some degree it is a matter of one's own identity as a competent linguistic performer which is being forcibly revised. Our insecurity is rooted in the fact that we have lost power over aspects of our world, in which objects have no known name and are thus beyond our attempts to control them through language. The existence of our native tongue as a prior communicative tool has the implication that in the target language we are constantly meeting what we may dismiss as non-words, in terms of mother tongue. We do not normally meet non-words in normal usage, and certainly do not remember them when they are encountered. Arguably, in order to understand this better, we should return to the very basics, and to the development of language in the young.

If it is to the advantage of the individual to keep on learning from experience, to adapt one's world view to new ideas - for this may enhance the individual's prospects of survival - it may well be that there is no such advantage recognised by nature in the acquisition of a second language when we are adults.[8] So far as nature is concerned, the function of the individual is to live long enough to perpetuate the species, not to talk to foreigners. The ability to acquire the gift of language - any language - is needed as early as possible in the development of the individual. That way the

[7] These agreements in meaning are highly significant, of course. On occasion, learners can understand each other despite what is being said, almost as though they were colluding in an intense effort to communicate at all costs:
"Tiene las manchas enrolladas hasta la rodilla" (lit. "he has his stains rolled up to the knee", but which was intended to be "he has his sleeves rolled up to the elbow") was (in)correctly interpreted in a classroom exchange between interviewees 6 and 10, as though the intended sentence "Tiene las mangas enrolladas hasta el codo" had in fact been uttered. Neither learner was aware of any discrepancy.

[8] See Liebermann 1998 for the disadvantages inherent in adapting human anatomy for speech, and the consequent implications of its enormous importance in evolutionary terms.

benefits of language can be enjoyed for as long as the individual survives. But once we have acquired the language, we do not naturally need to go on acquiring others, for it seems reasonable to assume that language probably evolved at a time when human communities were small, isolated, and more than one language would be unnecessary. Natural selection tends to favour those processes that help the young, not the old. The neo-Darwinist Pinker suggests that the ability to acquire language when we are young, rather than when we are older,

> ....might be like other biological functions. The linguistic clumsiness of tourists and students might be the price we pay for the linguistic genius we displayed as babies, just as the decrepitude of age is the price we pay for the vigor of youth. (Pinker, 1994, 296)

With the increase in age comes an increase in bodily and mental vulnerability. The processes of natural selection will opt for situations that favour the young, because death is an asymmetrical process. Death of the individual at 40 means that there will be no 50-year-old to worry about - the individual has become biologically dispensable - but it also means that there was earlier a 30-year-old, and a 20-year-old, that has fulfilled its biological functions. The question then becomes of one of when the ability to learn language is at its most essential, rather than when the ability fades. After all, the sooner we are able to learn a language, the longer we can benefit, irrespective of individual lifespan, from its possession and from whatever advantages it can offer. Pinker argues that

> learning a language - as opposed to *using* a language - is perfectly useful as a one-shot skill. Once the details of the local language have been acquired from the surrounding adults, any further ability to learn (aside from vocabulary) is superfluous..... So language-acquisition circuitry is not needed once it has been used; it should be dismantled if keeping it around incurs any costs. And it probably does incur costs. (Pinker, 1994, 294)

So, when we learn our first language we do so with our relevant faculties at their keenest. We explore the world through the medium of language, and explore the frontiers of language as it reflects and interprets that world. As we develop our personal map of the world, we experience no language interference, for we have no source of interference - mentalese, which we use in our individual Mohican style - is common to us all. When we try to repeat the process as adults, we do so with weakened language-learning faculties, which are no longer necessary to our survival, with a map of the world which has been developed in line with that of the society in which we were brought up, and with a magnificent system of communication already in place. So good is this system that it interferes with any new system that we try to introduce, jamming and over-riding the intruder.

Now, although the child is for the most part defined by others, in terms of linguistic development and of social identity, the adult is socially defined, through language, by himself as well as by others. The distinction may appear to be a slight one, but it has profound implications. There is a sense in which the whole notion of identity, the whole awareness of self, is a concept which relies upon the existence of a group. After all, our individual identity is a concept which continues to evolve, and that evolutionary process occurs against a background of the social group. As Edwards tells us, the essence of our notion of identity

> ...is a sense of groupness which is vital precisely because it survives radical change. ....Groupness resides, ultimately, in individual identity and this, in turn, is highly related to personal security and well-being. It follows that, at both the individual and the group level, markers will be altered and practices adjusted to the extent to which they are seen to interfere with these quantities. (Edwards 1985, 168-9.)

Considerations of the use of language as a group activity - and, indeed, the learning of a second language as a group activity, form the subject of Chapter 5. If I make reference to them here in passing, it is because the adult already has a multiplicity of identities all of which are to some degree definable within the terms of reference

provided by the groups in which s/he is included or from which s/he is excluded. The integration of the adult learner into a language-learning group is, at one level, merely another instance of that adult associating with a group. However, it is a learning group, and that by implication will involve change and the traumas associated with change. Not only that, but it is a group whose function and purpose is to expose the learner to what is deemed to be foreign, and thereby shed a new light on what is held to be familiar.

Adults filter all new learning through their own established ideas about language and the world. Objectivity is itself a construct from experience -

> The 'world' that impinged on the mind, the 'world' that the mind somehow reflected, ...was not an image of external reality. The 'world' was the result of intellectual process. (Bruner, 1983, 34.)

The need to make sense of this world can lead up blind alleys. Second language learning involves the building, revision and rebuilding of hypotheses on how the target language operates. It is instructive to compare this with the process that we all undergo as children, as we become aware of the powers of our native language to help our interpretation of the world.

According to Piaget, before the age of eight, the egocentric nature of thought is absolute. Between eight and twelve years of age, the influence of egocentrism is limited to a single sphere or portion of thought - that sphere which is segregated from reasoning. Before the age of eight, Piaget argues, the child is 'impervious to experience', and does not re-interpret the world in any light other than his own. But Bleuler's reality function is also there. The child operates in the real world without understanding it in adult terms, and this is understandably a source of potential error and misunderstanding at the cognitive level, as well as at the linguistic level. There arises the question of error. It is helpful to consider what constitutes error, as well as what we expect from ourselves and from others in terms of linguistic perfection.

> It depends how big and how often, but minor mistakes I don't think are very important. I suppose that if you can communicate your idea across to the other person then the odd mistake doesn't matter, except on a basic level. If I make mistakes, in Spanish, then I think I've got an excuse as I don't think I'm the best linguist in the world, but at the same time if I make mistakes in French, which I have studied formally and at university and it's something I'm supposed to be good at then I do get very embarrassed because I'm letting myself down. (12)

In a first approximation to a theory of error types, Corder suggested three gross categories of error, namely: a) presystematic, (made by a learner while s/he is groping about trying to understand a new point); b) systematic, (produced when the learner has formed some conception of the point at issue - a hypothesis - which is, however, wrong in some way); and c) post-systematic error, (which covers deviant language forms which occur where previously systematic errors have been corrected - in other words, where there is good reason to believe that a point has been correctly understood and performance has been mainly accurate but the learner has temporarily forgotten it.) (Corder, 1974) As a working framework, these categories are helpful, as they are diagnostic of the status of the learner at any given time. However, it has been justly argued that they have their limitations:

> While this three-way division of errors is eminently reasonable, and highlights the importance of the formation of hypotheses, their refinement and their eventual fixation, it lacks a robust criterion for an outsider who is not privy to the learner's mind to operate the division with. (McDonough. 1981, 113.)

Corder's fundamental criterion was whether self-correction and explanation of the error were possible. With presystematic error, the learner might not know an error had been made, and would be unable to correct or explain it. S/he would not be able to correct a systematic error, but could explain why s/he produced the form in question. S/he would be able both to correct and explain a post-systematic error, if it

were pointed out. However, all this presupposes that the learner is somehow able retrospectively to gauge the state of mind in which s/he was at the time that the error was produced, and also that the theoretical knowledge that the student might wish to possess, (as well as the hypotheses that led to the error in the first place,) is uniformly clear and accessible. As McDonough pointed out, this is not necessarily the case:

> Situations are conceivable when an error would be wrongly classified because, for example, the learner was unable to express the hypothesis he had entertained - after all, native speakers can rarely formulate the rules according to which they are speaking, so one cannot assume that non-native speakers will necessarily do any better. (McDonough 1981, 113.)

Selinker (1972) produced a further and more controversial classification of systematic error, and identified nine types in a list that was not claimed to be exhaustive. These are assumed to be related to nine types of learning process or strategy. Selinker was careful to point out that, concerning the word 'strategy', " a viable definition of it does not seem possible at present" (Selinker 1972, 39). The same, of course, is true of the word 'process', as McDonough points out. (McDonough, 1974, 113) It also ignores the fact that as learners of a second language, as in everything else, we are all different, and we may well produce observably similar effects from very different causes, language and human nature being what they are.

It is instructive to examine what the student interviewees reported in relation to error, with reference to Selinker's classification, for which there emerges considerable support. Selinker's nine types of systematic error begin with language transfer, directly traceable to the native language. As far as the adult learner is concerned, this type of error results from the fact that, for a lifetime, there has been a perfectly adequate way to say whatever needs to be communicated now. The challenge for the adult learner is how to ignore, subvert, or overcome the habits of a lifetime, and express the concept in a new way.

> If you ask me a question in Spanish, I have to think of the answer in English before I can give the Spanish.
> Q>. *You rehearse the answer first in English, or you let it form...?*
> A>. I let it form, not rehearsing word for word... but the idea is formed in English before it comes out in Spanish... (7) (Cited above)

Secondly, there is transfer of training - directly traceable to some (imperfectly grasped) element in the teaching. However much teachers would like to feel that they teach everything with equal skill, clarity, and inescapable logic, the fact remains that, even if we did so, a moment's inattention on the part of the learner would be enough to produce irregularities in the depth of understanding. While teaching and learning are necessarily and correctly conceived as related activities, it is absurdly simplistic to view them as simply being obverse and reverse of the same coin. By the same token, particularly in the context of a second language, it remains no less true than in the case of our mother tongue that while the vocabulary and lexical variations to which we are exposed can be regarded as a body of knowledge which is transmitted from experienced members of a society to those who are learning to become so, the fact that language is a discrete combinatorial system means that there is more to a correct, spontaneous use of that language in the real world than is transmissible in the teaching/learning situation.

> Well, the same again happened to me in Hong Kong .... oriental languages are very difficult because I think at first it's difficult to identity the sounds, because they're tone-based languages ....I would get the tones wrong and one time instead of saying 'these prawns are nice' I said somebody had smelly body parts or something...this caused a great deal of mayhem in a restaurant...but it's obviously something you've got to live with, that you're going to make mistakes. (4)

Selinker's third category involves a second-language learning strategy, in which the learner settles for a simpler version of reality than would normally be expressed in the mother tongue:

> If you asked me for an opinion, I would say what is easiest for me to say, given the amount of knowledge that I have, in Spanish, which is not necessarily my knowledge in English of opinions, and so on.
> Q> *This would not lead to direct contradiction with your own views, but might fall short of the subtleties of what you would like to say?*
> A> Yes, that's right.
> Q> *So is this a question of not representing the truth the way you would like to represent it?*
> A> No, that's not really what I meant to say... The views that I give in Spanish are not necessarily those that I give in English...
> Q> *And the difference between those views...?*
> A> ...is that I can't say everything I would like to in Spanish. It is a simpler version that is expressed. I find that frustrating. I would like to have this sort of conversation in Spanish, but I don't think I'm capable of it.(7)

An alternative second-language communication strategy can also emerge, in which the learner discovers s/he can be understood perfectly well without finer adjustments to word order, verb endings, adjectival agreements, or whatever particular linguistic horrors are a feature of the language in question. The learner is liable to feel that speech production is unacceptably slow or hesitating if s/he endeavours to get it absolutely right, all the time.

> I think I'm more concerned just about communicating. I'll try to correct myself... I appreciate it when people tell me I've made a mistake. Slowing down a bit, making mistakes, I just accept it as part of language learning. (8)

A fifth area in which error is common lies in the overgeneralisation of rules, which makes the rule, once partially understood, apply in every case. It is the result of ignorance of rule restrictions, and its commonest manifestation in Spanish is the irresistible siren call of the subjunctive.

There is also a powerful over-reliance on the written form of the language, whether because the written form is being presented too early or in the absence of aural familiarity with the conventions of the target language, or perhaps because of an excessive sophistication and reliance on the written word as somehow being a more dependable - because less threatening, or more familiar - mode of communication, can lead to the pronunciation of words as they are written, such as the *-ent* endings in French.

> Q> *Do you feel that in some way the business of speaking is intrinsically more difficult than the business of reading?*
> A> Yes. It is for me.
> Q> *Has it always been so, or is this something that you're feeling more recently?*
> A> Oh, more recently. Are you just talking about foreign language now, when you say more recently?
> Q> *I think so, yes.*
> A> It's difficult to remember as far back... No, I suppose when I first did French, either/or was all right, but I think that as I've gone on learning in the way I have been learning, from that age until now, it's much easier for me to do things from the written word which is held down in front of me, which gives me more chance, I find it's the same when you do something as simple as somebody giving me their address or their telephone number, if I really want to remember it I have to write it down... in English as well... so more and more I'm writing down more and more things, I'm surrounded by papers - everything has to be written down on paper. So that's a general trend, I think. I'm sure you'll find with younger students that they

don't have the difficulty with their speaking... that we older ones do. (10)

Then there is the problem of cognate pronunciations - the same word shape appears in the native and target languages, and is given native-language values of pronunciation and/or intonation in the target language context. It seems to me that this is simply an aspect of transfer, and as such is to be included above. However, I would add that when non-cognates have identical spellings, such as the Spanish *once* or *ten*, these are typically not seen as evoking English values.

Selinker also addresses the question of holophrase learning, in which, for instance, the greeting "Good morning, sir" is addressed not only to adult males but also indiscriminately to children or to females. Moreover, it might be argued that in most registers such expressions are incorrect (i.e. non-native) usage nowadays, however well they might be targeted. Errors of this type are more typical of stressful and formal oral examinations than they are of the more relaxed and informal language use current in pairs work.[9]

Selinker's final category is that of hypercorrection in pronunciation, as in self-conscious attempts at producing the French *"u"* which can lead on occasion to the production of something more closely resembling *"ee"*.

Some of the problems in this system are immediately obvious. The difference between communication and learning strategies may seem plausible, but how do you infer the cause of an error with enough accuracy to know where to place it? Both result in simplification of the target language in order to reduce the learner's cognitive load. However, the fact that it is difficult to choose between two categories of error does not necessarily mean that the distinction between them is meaningless. It may be that on occasion the error could equally well belong to one or the other group. Not all learners take the same route to the same error, as we work out our own linguistic

[9] After many years of working as an external examiner I long ago ceased to be surprised at being resolutely addressed as "Madame", although this is a very rare event in the classroom situation, and is almost invariably corrected at once by the student.

salvation in highly individual ways. However we choose to classify errors and the reasons for them , the production of errors and the students' reaction to their production remain an important feature of the learner's struggle to improve:

> I find it difficult to speak because I want to speak accurately. The idea of making mistakes is important - it's silly, but it is important. (3)

Even when we accept the certainty of making mistakes, it is not a pleasant experience for an adult. After all, adults are the ones who are supposed to know the answers. On a personal level, and yet again on a professional level, the experience of being seen to make mistakes, in public, can be a daunting one.

> I don't like to make mistakes. It's not terribly important when you're learning, in fact in some ways it's a good thing. If you make mistakes they're corrected by the tutor and sometimes it sinks in more. But it's not a nice feeling - I don't think anyone likes to make mistakes. In class it wouldn't really bother me if I'd said something wrong, because we are all in the same position - what I don't like is being in the same class with people who are vastly superior...I find that a bit daunting. (5)

> *Q.> How do you feel about being corrected by the teacher?*
> A.> I don't mind being corrected but I feel self-conscious because I made the mistake in the first place, and normally I know perfectly well what it should have been. What alarms me is that my father had lived in this country for 40 - 45 years, and he never ever lost his accent - can you ever learn to speak a foreign language properly so that they don't know? (3)

One of the reasons for being frightened to make mistakes may well have to do with our education system, which has instilled in many generations the notion of a standard version of English as the norm, and marginalizes variations on that standard as

impurities. This may be less so today than it was in my childhood, but for many adult learners this is an attitude towards their own language use which can inhibit creative experiment with the target language. The notion of 'grammaticality' tends to reinforce the notion of 'right' - and therefore of 'wrong' - usage, and the concrete nature of the written sentence also confirms the idea of language as an object. Writing reifies, and holds things still for long enough for an evaluation of the 'rightness' or otherwise of a structure, and this has implications for the strategy that a tutor adopts with regard to the correction of error.

Corrective feedback is an important aspect of the learning process. The decision has to be made, when faced with an error, whether it should be corrected at once, or whether correction should be postponed until later. The third option, also a responsible one, is that of ignoring the error completely. In order to decide which of these options to pursue on any given occasion, the tutor must be influenced by the importance attached to the error (which should vary according to the group involved), its frequency in the class, and whether the correct version is known and therefore could have been produced. When class activities are structured in such a way as to allow the active involvement of small subgroups in language production, they also help in the identification and immediate correction of error, although the fact that the tutor is not omnipresent means that some will inevitably go uncorrected.

One way to reach understanding is by having things explained. Listening, although essential, is not enough by itself. Any student who leaves a language class with the feeling that there is nothing further to do before the next time the group meets, is adopting a very dangerous and ultimately futile approach, as though learning a language were somehow akin to passive smoking - just keep breathing long enough and something is bound to happen. Teaching a language is not like teaching people how to build cathedrals. It is about acting as a guide to the cathedral that is already there, so that the learner is able to find pathways through and around, both understanding and enjoying the features of the journey at the same time.

> ....the listener must achieve the same cognitive structure as the explainer in order to become aware of the essential connections

between the relevant facts. The educational implications of achieving insight through explanation cannot be overestimated. Not only is it satisfying to grasp the solution to a problem, but it is far less likely to be forgotten than rote memorisation, and it can be readily transferred to related new problems. (Rock and Palmer, 1990, 60).

However well things are explained, it remains the case that through imperfect retention of detail, or lack of practice, or the constant subversion of the target language use through interference from the mother tongue or some other language, people continue to make mistakes in both productive skills. This is no bad thing in the long term, as the experience of error is essential to correct language use, language performance being infinitely variable and depending upon experimental recombination of elements. It does raise some questions, however, which need to be addressed, if we are to seek ways to exploit this positive value of error in our teaching.

Language use is partly a matter of motor skill, and partly one of mental agility. Its grammar depends on, and structures, our experience of the passage of time, and it operates, as we have seen, both in a private forum, as thought, and also in a public forum.

It is in our system of public examinations that we have refined the torment attendant on making mistakes, and have turned error into terror. Examinations are a forum in which a durable record of our imperfections is kept, and in a context to which we have leaned to give importance. Adult students, by and large, have no love for examinations, and express their feelings strongly:

Q> How do you feel about exams?

A> Nervous. I used to become physically ill at school before exams, and I'm still nervous now. The written part holds no fears at all, just the oral. I think it is in some way simply more difficult - everyone felt like that, not just me. Adults, who have probably done lots of exams, when they come to do an oral they just panic. At the

> end of the day there's nothing to panic about, we know that, but at the time it's horrendous. (5)
>
> I hate them. They make me want to not learn Spanish any more, because of the fear of failing. If I came out with excellent marks then obviously I'd be glad I'd done them. It makes me want to run away and hide. I probably find that although I hardly ever do homework anyway I'm doing even less because it's a way of shutting it out. It's only since I've been older that I've adopted this attitude, since I came out of the education system. Mind you, I was probably a bit like that at university as well. (12)

If the fear of error, whether in public or in private, is a threat to second-language learners, then activities which contain a licensing of error built into them can offer some relief. I have examined elsewhere (Watts, 1991) the value of allowing adults, who have become infantilised through the limitations of their newly-acquired language, to explore those limitations through play. Play for adults is a temporary state which is only incidentally part of the real world, in that it allows us to pretend that things are other than they are - much day to day adult thought and activity is dedicated to exploring or controlling or denying aspects of "reality", and for this reason it can be difficult for adults to engage in play. Play for adults tends to involve sharing a common fantasy, rather than a private, internal exploration of what is real. Hence the value of role-play in pairs as a context in which oral language performance can improve.

Adults may frequently need encouragement in the classroom to engage in play activities, not least because their traditional views of what constitutes learning and study, founded on their earlier experiences, may incorporate a greater degree of formality. Adults do play, though, even if they don't necessarily play the same kinds of game as they used to as children. Their sense of identity includes being players of football or bridge or whatever, and this serves to identify them as members of a group, and as non-members of other groups.

On the level of the individual also, there is scope for acting as the other kind of player - the pretender, the wearer of masks, the one who assumes an identity as a persona, for a purpose. Language is also of fundamental importance in this feature of our lives, of course, and once again the apparently negative aspects can be channelled into something that enhances learning through the creative use of role-play, not in order to mislead, but in order to encourage student identification with a language-oriented role.

There is an enormous difference in significance between those errors that are diagnostic of the zone of proximal development, which are only avoided by luck rather than informed judgement, and those which result from inattention. It is helpful to share this distinction with the students, so that they learn to eliminate those errors that they are sufficiently prepared to recognise, and also learn to forgive themselves for having committed errors rooted in the limitations of their interlanguage. At the earliest stages there are naturally few errors, and little interference since the volume of manipulable language at the learners' disposal is so small. *Ab initio* learners tend not to be too concerned about the parts of speech, but often complain about the words in between, the function words, that frequently have more than one clear meaning. As a matter of interpretation, for learners of Spanish, *de* is difficult in a way that *calamares* is not. *De* does not fit in with our previous notions of reality, whereas *calamares* is just an alternative - and no less arbitrary - name for squid. Whatever is held to constitute error, the ways in which we respond to errors of our own are crucial to an understanding of the progress that we are likely to make in our pursuit of competence in the target language, and are very deeply rooted in the relationship that we have formed with our native language.

Chapter 7 will address in greater detail the phenomenon of ageing as presenting a series both of problems and benefits, but it should be mentioned here in general terms that the difficulties inherent in language learning at any time are exacerbated with increasing age. On occasion, this is because the adult learner's expectations are different from those of a younger student:

> I've been doing it because I wanted to, whereas I feel quite sorry for the children at school. When you've got to do something that's the

worst way...it will kill somebody's enthusiasm. Still, children need to be made to do things...so many distractions that crowd in which you outgrow or see differently as you age. Also the speed with which you learn a language can put you off...at the university, I really think I would have learned an awful lot more with you here, going at a slower rate because it doesn't sink in when you're doing it as quickly as that...or perhaps that's with age? Or is it that what you learn fast you can also forget fast, and it starts to fade very quickly? My results are as good as the other students, but I don't feel that I've grasped it nearly as well, whereas they may not think in terms of 'have I grasped it?', but may just think 'have I got through the exam?' (3)

Increasing age has implications for memory:

I wondered if my memory would let me down. I've had another birthday since I last saw you... I'm heading up for 70 now, you know. I'm 70 next year.

Q> To someone in her 60's, this business of learning a language must present different challenges from what it used to?

*A>*Yes, it certainly doesn't come as easily as it used to. I didn't have any problems at all when I was younger. I found French rather difficult, having been used to translation all the time, and I found it a bit difficult listening and trying to separate words, that's the difficulty. Reading I can make sense of it, but separating words when people speak, especially if they speak quickly...(9)

The child develops oral and listening skills long before it is able to read or write. The adult second-language learner feels instinctively more at home with the written word. This is not only because writing something down holds it still for long enough to let one have a good look at it. It is also because there is the convention in writing that individual words are separated from one another by a fine margin of white space. When we listen to our own language, we are so familiar with the twists and turns that

a sentence is likely to make that we can identify the breaks between one word and the next, not physically, but semantically. We supply the gaps that are not really there. In another language we have to learn how to do this trick, otherwise we can not distinguish meaning from within the uninterrupted stream of sound. Fortunately, what makes the acquisition of a second language possible at all, is the adaptive complexity of our first language, or rather, the fact that we have learned to exploit that adaptive complexity. The flexibility of that discrete combinatorial system allows language acquisition to continue, although with very little of the ease so evident in the infant learner.

On the positive side, motivation can be high:

> *Q> So your attitude to language study changes with age, it is a generational thing? When you are 16 you look at language learning as you might look at the learning of anything else, partly a chore, and partly a responsibility, and partly a way of not doing woodwork?*
>
> A>That's right, exactly, but as an adult you do it because you're choosing to do it and that's far nicer. I think that's also why you learn, because you want to do it - this is where some children feel terrible, because if you're in a group with people that are an awful lot better than you are, and it clams you up, for one thing, and then you feel that you are the dunce in the class - you just don't want to do anything. (3)

Moreover, feelings of competition are ideally reduced, if due attention is paid to the importance of a non-competitive atmosphere in the classroom:

> *Q> And that (i.e., the sense of inferiority as a child) is reinforced every lesson because the situation is not allowed to change. And that doesn't happen with an adult, you feel, or they're not aware of it happening?*

A>Oh, I think they're aware of it happening, you're aware perhaps that you're not so good as other people, but I think you can cope with it as an adult. You're learning as an adult, there because you want to do it, and you're not really competing with other people. You may be going on holiday and want to say a few words when you get there, read from the menu or something simple - I think you get your pleasure from that. It's to improve your own work at your own pace, not for reasons of competition. (3)

A belief emerges that mental ageing may somehow be kept at bay, despite the undoubted ravages of time, by keeping the brain active:

I think at my age memory is not what it used to be. I find I can get up to go and do something and when I get where I want to be I've forgotten what I've gone for... and this is age. Nothing that I can do anything about. And I was just afraid that this would happen more in the language programme...um... it hasn't, not so far. I tend to go to bed at night and go over it at night, and so far it's been all right. Now whether it'll be easy to go on, I don't know.

Q> I have one student who is doing an A level course, and who is repeating the A level course for the I don't know howmanyth year, who is quite convinced - she's a lady of about your age - that studying a language helps to keep memory problems at bay.

A> Yes, that was another part of the reason why I came, why I started the French in the first place, because I thought that if I had something that I had to think about it would keep my mind active and perhaps delay this memory loss. I think this is so. (9)

It is at this stage particularly that Lecercle's "remainder" comes in, as the oddities of language - anagrams, homophones and so forth - begin to plague the adult second-language learner. Too much is there to be interpreted on the basis of too little knowledge, and our minds struggle to interpret what is obscure by the warm, welcoming light of Pragnanz. Even when this stage is left behind, we come up against

the potential for confusion inherent in the fact that the meaning of a word is not an isolated independent thing - it is affected by the penumbra of the words that surround it. The vocabulary of any language is made up of clusters of words associated within meaning systems, hence the semantic priming effect which allows us unconsciously to foreground elements of vocabulary that we are likely to hear or require in a given context. Language at work requires an interpretative interaction. Fairclough's observations on the interpretation of text as being the interpretation of an interpretation are relevant here, and can be applied as much to an oral exchange as to a written one.

There is a collective feeling among the adult learners interviewed that a hierarchy of difficulty exists and always existed, that it is easier to perform the receptive skills than the productive, and that the gap between these two areas of skill has perhaps widened with increasing age:

> It's not easy, now. I found it much easier of course when I was young, naturally, and doing Latin I found that I could manage quite a lot just by making words, building words from roots that I knew. I never did very well at homework, but I did all right in exams. I can't explain that, except that I probably wasn't very interested in homework, but I found Latin quite easy. I found Latin quite easy, and I enjoyed French, changing songs in to French and translating anything that came up.
> *Q> You say it's more difficult now - and I assume that's a reference to age rather than to anything else... do you find that the difficulties are acquiring new vocabulary, or making sense out of the new grammar - does the whole process slow you down...?*
> *A>* I think it's memory - I can't retain it quite as well as I used to. I can cope with it in class, but if you ask me about it a half-hour later I'd probably have forgotten most of it, until I sit down and read it up again. *(9)*
>
> *Q> Is it hard work?*

A> If I do it properly it's hard work, yes. Now I'm not finding it as easy to remember words, because I'm not finding it as easy to remember words in my own language, so sometimes I'm struggling for a word which I know I know, which is infuriating, but I now do that in English. It's age, I suppose. Brain cells deteriorating... I can see the word I want... in English, I can see the word I want, I've got a picture of it, and I cannot...it's not a matter of memory, obviously, it's a matter of retrieval, isn't it? Because I know the word is in there somewhere, and I know lots of Spanish words are in there somewhere, but it's lack of getting them back out. So that it becomes much much easier to read because the words are there, and having seen them I know what they mean. It's much easier to do that than to get the words out of my own head, even those that are there. (10)

There is widespread agreement among interviewees that it is hard to learn a second language beyond a certain age because something changes. The task and the medium become one, in that attempts are made to express thought by means of the target language. Mother-tongue ability is rarely matched, even after years of study, in a second or subsequent language. There is apparently no other system of knowledge that one can 'learn' better at 2 or 3 years old than at 15 or 25. Some obvious barriers include the facts that most people attempting to learn a second language do so in their teenage or adult years; they attempt to do so in a few hours each week of contact time (rather than the constant interaction which is experienced by the child), they already have lives with a lot of other demands on their time (whereas the child has little else to do), and the native language is already available for most daily communicative requirements. The mother tongue is acquired, i.e., there is a gradual development of *ability through natural communicative use, which contrasts with the conscious process* of accumulating knowledge about the second or subsequent language, which is usually learned. (See Yule 1985, 150-7)

There is a powerful sense in which language-learning, and not only successful language retrieval, is an age-related activity. It has long been argued that a critical

period existed for language acquisition, and that the end of this critical period is synchronous with the lateralization of brain activity at about the time of puberty, according to some authorities.[10] After this critical period has passed, the acquisition of a second language becomes more difficult. Lateralization is often cited as a crucial factor, as though the language faculty is taken over by what has now become the mother tongue, and loses the flexibility needed to deal with the features of a second or subsequent language.

> ....the ability to learn a language appears to decline beginning around early adolescence: acquisition of a second language without an accent is virtually impossible by late adolescence, and mastery of fine points of syntax that are second nature even to uneducated native speakers is difficult for adults to attain. This kind of evidence points to a neurologically determined critical period for language acquisition. (Pinker 1990, 213)

Vygotsky (1997) made the observation that the child lives in a bifurcated reality, which is self-centred and aware only of the distinction between what is "I" and what is "not-I". The development of the child's language serves as an eventual bridge to reconcile this bifurcated reality and make it possible for reality, as adults know it, to be interpreted also in more adult ways. In practical terms, this may mean that if, as Berne says, transactional analysis involves a child role, we can ask which part of the bifurcation is addressed in the second-language learning/teaching process? Does this process recapitulate a mirror image of the earlier childhood experience, namely that the adult now knows his reality which is internal and external, whereas the child knew a different (personal, partial) inner reality, and the teacher made a professional input regardless of it? Although the adult world is aware, unlike the world of childhood, of external reality, it remains paradoxically more difficult, rather than easier, for the adult second-language learner. Chapter 5 will explore the bifurcation of the adult second-language world.

[10] e.g. Lenneberg 1967, although see Buffery 1978, Kinsbourne and Hiscock 1987, Aitchison 1989, Springer and Deutsch 1989, for indications that lateralization may be present much earlier.

CHAPTER 5

LANGUAGE LEARNING AS A GROUP ACTIVITY

Watching a class of language-learners at all but the most advanced stages leads us inevitably to wonder how the communicative process can be so effortless in the native language (whatever language that may be), and such hard work in a second or subsequent language that has not yet been fully mastered. Is it simply behavioural, in that the mother tongue is always struggling to come out in preference to any other? Or is it rather that the mind operates in a given language, most naturally and easily the mother tongue, unless and until it is forcibly required to do otherwise? The amount of forcing depends on familiarity with the language that one is endeavouring to learn, but given the existence of options there must be always a decision, conscious or unconscious, to operate in a given language at any one time. It would appear that this is an example of selection restriction, and that, just as with register, in which we constantly make minor adjustments and seek feedback to show that we are being understood, so too with the choice of a language in which to express ourselves, the initial use of mother tongue leads to more mother tongue use until something happens to force a change. Similarly, the decision to use a second or subsequent language leads to continued use of that language until we run out of ways of saying whatever we want to say.

Social activities by definition take place in a social setting, identifiable perhaps as an interpersonal exchange, the locus of such an exchange, or most frequently and meaningfully as a combination of these. The nature of that social setting affects the nature of the activities which can take place in it. Language reflects the nature of the social setting in which it is employed. At the same time, language is involved in the structuring of that setting, in its maintenance, and potentially in its eventual subversion. This is not true only of the second-language learning group. It has been true for each of the members of that group throughout their development as individuals. A relationship has been established between the adult and his/her native language, which operates at both conscious and unconscious levels, and which will

have an inescapable bearing upon events as they unfold in the second-language learning class.

With reference to the learning group, then, the native language of the participants forms part of the social structure against which the group has come into being. Most language use, as we perceive it, takes place at the level of the individual, rather than at the level of the linguistic community. Therefore the social nature of a linguistic interaction is affected and structured not only by the characteristics of the society to which the individual belongs, but also to that new and transient social context, composed of two or more individuals, which is the locus for the interaction. Each member of the group will have a notion of self, partly formed and partly expressible if need be in terms of language use. We interact with others, at least in part, by means of what we say to one another. The things that we feel free to say to one another are dictated by a number of factors, but among them we can cite our feelings of belonging to or alienation from our society as a whole, and those relating to the particular sub-group in which we wish or need to operate at a given time. Small eddies affect the ways in which we communicate, and the significant characteristics of that transient social context include the individuals' concepts not only of themselves but also of one another, according to a number of criteria.

Notions of superiority, equality or inferiority of the interlocutor, whether in terms of the larger society or in terms of one of its subsets, (the workplace, for example, or the church community, or the marriage bed) will influence many aspects of the exchange. Among these: the order of participant speeches; the length of utterances; the tone and volume of the voices; whether or not interruptions are considered acceptable by either party (and, if so, who does most of the interrupting); any discrepancy in register between the participants (which may give the advantage to one or the other in a conflictive situation); all these are obvious factors and have to do with the participants' view of one another. Linked inescapably to this view is the concomitant view of the standing of the self, relative to that of the interlocutor. The interlocutor, in this view, stands as one point of reference for our appreciation and evaluation of our self.

In addition, there are other more subtle factors which influence any linguistic interaction, and which have more to do with the participants' view of themselves against a broader background than that provided by the presence of one another. Among these we find notions of class, affecting the speaker's self-view in relation to the interlocutor, which can sometimes lead to an intensification of discrepancy in register in conflictive situations; the relationship of confidence and familiarity (or otherwise) that the participant has with his/her native language as a means of self-expression and which is frequently linked to feelings of belonging to a particular class or element in the broader cultural background; the speaker's awareness (whether consciously expressed or otherwise) of a personal history of success or failure in using language as a means to secure one's own ends or guarantee the protection of one's perceived interests; and the gender of the speaker and the interlocutor.

The business of learning a second language as an adult remains primarily an experience of women, which reflects the situation in our secondary schools. There too, once the compulsory element has been survived by all, the experience of learning and hopefully of enjoying the learning of a modern foreign language remains a female experience, rather than a male one. Analysis of the available statistics shows that women make up between 51.7% and 77.1% of enrolments on language courses at New College.[11] Women, yet again and stereotypically, seem to be the ones expected or willing to make the effort to communicate. Not for nothing do we speak of "mother-tongue".

A linguistic exchange is primarily a participatory event. When both participants in a dialogue are using a common mother-tongue, there is clearly room for conflict to arise out of the inequalities, whether real or imagined, perceived by either party to exist between them, coupled also with each speaker's view of themselves as successful or otherwise in language use. The participation in the exchange need not be entirely voluntary or even desirable, and might be no more than collaboration in a conflict, expressed through language but rooted elsewhere.

[11] For a more detailed analysis of the statistical evidence, see Appendix 1.

These observations apply to normal mother-tongue language use in everyday personal interactions. A social gathering is a locus for such interactions, but many types of social gatherings are relatively short-lived and the language that is used there serves a utilitarian purpose. A learning group, however, while remaining a locus for interaction of the kind I have described, has other characteristics which serve to distinguish it in a number of ways from the short-lived arena of everyday interaction.

Among these characteristics are the fact that the learning group meets repeatedly, at an agreed time and place and for an agreed length of time; has a definite and limited membership, such that non-members are quickly and easily identifiable; and has a common task or tasks which may nevertheless imply different things for different members of the group. [12] I take these aspects of the group reality to be, broadly speaking, positive aspects of the group circumstance. I see them as positive in that they provide an element of stability and a framework of points of reference. However, there are already some potential problems implicit in the identification and formation of out-groups, and in differences in interpretation of the task, since feelings of belonging to or ostracism from a group can be an extremely powerful factor in encouraging concentration on the task in hand, once it has been identified and agreed by all, or in enforcing conformity, which is much more dangerous.

At an interpersonal level, the group is composed of members who have numerous other concerns in their lives besides the meetings of the group; is composed of members who frequently have no contact with one another beyond the confines of the group; develops internal tensions and struggles of its own; and meets often only once or twice a week, thus focusing its internal tensions on the meetings but continuing to allow them to simmer between sessions. The aspects of the group activity have far less to do with the logistics of group organisation and far more to do with the idiosyncrasies of the make-up of a given learning group as such, and of the people who compose it. There are many powerful forces potentially at work here, and they will find much of their expression in the form of language.

[12] In context, this often has much to do with the transmission of the culture, both through the content of what is examined and taught, and also through the mode(s) of delivery.

As regards its dynamic, the group tends, if time allows, to take on predictable patterns of behaviour in response to internal needs, and can be immensely supportive, and immensely inhibiting, in the individual learning process. These final points have to do with the nature of the group process, regardless of the identity of the individual group and of the task which has been set. At different stages of its existence, the group will generate different levels of energy and will spray that energy around in noticeably different ways. Once the so-called "performing" stage has been reached, the group tasks can be addressed with vigour and enthusiasm, and much headway can be made in a relatively short time. Until that stage is achieved, however, there is room for conflict, indecision and withdrawal.

All these points combine in working towards a taxonomy of a typical learning group, although the proportion of each ingredient in the overall make-up of the group will necessarily vary from one to the next. It is against that background that the interpersonal factors listed above will come into play. To this extent, a group which has the learning of a language as its task is no different from any other. Yet there is in language-learning one element which makes it different from the study of history, say, or mathematics. Language is an activity, as well as an object of study, and it is a social - and therefore a public - activity. It requires the active involvement of other people if it is to succeed. The instinct to communicate provides the impulse, not the expertise, and like many other essentially human activities language is something that you learn how to do correctly, chiefly through having done it incorrectly first.

Some observations have been made above concerning the concept and the significance of error. The notion of "being wrong" is such an important consideration in so much of what we do, that it should now be considered in the light of the three preceding chapters. In so far as language echoes, reveals or interprets some aspects of reality, to be in error implies either ignorance or falsehood in the context of the accepted world-view. For an adult to reveal ignorance is to risk the disdain, disapproval or overt hostility of those whose world-view is closer to the accepted norm, and it is to invite marginalization within the orthodox group. To deal in perceived falsehood is to risk expulsion or destruction at the hands of the orthodox. At this level, then, the notion of error is a divisive and subversive thing, calling into question one's competence as an

adult and, as the self-concept of the adult is validated by the group, resulting in the eventual acceptance of relegation to an outgroup of those who persist in relaying it.

When we consider the significance of error in the context of language and its ability to convey meaning by allowing the evocation of conceptual values, then misuse of metaphor - the "hellish church" for example - serves once again to emphasise variety rather than community of values.

The whole concept of right and wrong in language use, of error and of "making mistakes" is a profoundly unsettling and debilitating notion which can undermine the self-confidence and hence the progress of the adult learner. It has already been noted above (Chapter 3) that language dysfunction has a socially isolating effect. This marginalization from the in-group results from an error in self-expression. Normal language use is not a question of the kind of accuracy that can be measured by multiple choice, along the lines of "The battle of Hastings was fought in 1066/1812." From the point of view of grammatical structure, these two sentences are equally correct. Moreover, normal language use should not be judged as successful or unsuccessful along such intransigent lines, thereby leading to a verdict of approval or disapproval. When as tutors we examine the interlanguage work of our students, we are looking not so much at evidence of error, but rather at the need for further practice.

Not everyone finds that part of the process easy, or enjoyable. Some of the problems have their roots in the very nature of language itself, and in the fact that even in our first languages we are often guilty of flawed or partial communication at best. This happens most in the oral range, but we have at our disposal a varied and sophisticated set of controls, both verbal and non-verbal, to help communication go ahead despite what we say to each other. These controls are not present for the complete beginner in the target language, and their absence compounds the difficulty of the communicative task.

In a situation in which everyone concerned feels vulnerable, it helps enormously if the experience is taken as a shared one, without there being too great an awareness of

different levels of competence or experience. Age difference is not taken as a problem in itself, at least by the older members of the group:

> "The other students were between 16 and 70, probably, and we were all in the same boat, and if you start off and you see that you're quite good and doing better than other people are it certainly gives you the motivation to carry on.... " (3)

Normal patterns of first-language use can derive from unconscious assumptions about the needs of a group and of the people who make it up, such as the case of elderly people "underaccommodating" to younger people whom they engage in conversation. The other side of the coin can be a reticence on the part of the younger person to engage in the conversation on equal terms. (Giles and Coupland 1991) For young and adult learners alike, a second-language class is a place where one can not avoid the disconcerting realisation that the link between concept and name, between word and reality, which had previously appeared impregnable, is no more than an arbitrary social convention and one which, in this context, must be made to explode.

On the other hand, differences in age can also be reflected in differences in reaction to the difficulties and the work required, and this too can lead to division and withdrawal:

> "I've been in classes with adults and youngsters and I've seen the adults leave the youngsters way behind, because they've got the desire, they want to learn, and the youngsters are just doing it as another subject... last year in Italian the youngsters dropped off one by one until at the end of the course we were left with seven adults..." (5)

Sometimes it can be the novelty of the surroundings or the activities which can be disconcerting to the adult learner, but as language learning particularly relies upon its social context, it can also be an opportunity to meet people and share a rewarding and enjoyable social activity:

"I suppose it's a social thing, for me. I like coming to the class and meeting other people. I've made friends through the class." (6)

These new friendships can quickly translate into a network of support, which does so much to encourage the learner. The essential nature of peer support is also recognised:

"A stimulating teacher does make a lot of difference when you learn a language, that's what can make the wonderful experience because it is exciting for you and you want to go on and do more. Enthusiastic support from group members as well as the tutor. You don't always get that from younger people. They're doing it because they've been good at it and that's the logical thing to do, but I don't think they always get the excitement from it..." (3)

This awareness of difference and possible division is rarely far away. The reality is that in a Further Education context learners do not remain within a stable cohort that progresses unaltered from year to year. Even a longitudinal study of individual development has to take into account the annual fragmentation and restructuring of cohorts as some group members leave and others, more or less successfully, take their place. Measuring progress against some impersonal yardstick is all very well, though it still involves an element of threat, but as soon as comparisons with others begin to be made, the emotional stakes are raised:

"It's not a nice feeling. I don't think anyone likes to make mistakes. In class it wouldn't really bother me if I'd said something wrong, because we are all in the same position - what I don't like is being in the same class with people who are vastly superior - I find that a bit daunting." (5)

With the inevitable alterations in the make-up of a group comes an eventual disparity among some of the students. The constant restructuring of the group provides a new audience for public error, and reduces the group safety:

> "... if you're in a group with people that are an awful lot better than you are... it clams you up, for one thing, and then you feel that you are the dunce in the class - you just don't want to do anything." (3)

For some people the fact that they are expected to perform in public in front of a new and shifting audience leads to an increase in the

> "... level of anxiety, that I'm not prepared to make and say more mistakes than I do... I seem to take longer to go through something or read... I tend to dash at it and make more mistakes, and need to take more time over it than other people who seem to do it more quickly than I do..." (6)

As feelings of group safety diminish, so the fantasies begin. Some students see others as being "better" at this subject than they are, therefore they may be somehow better suited to the course, therefore the weaker ones should perhaps withdraw. The chief concerns expressed have to do with speed of response:

> "The main thing is, they're quick. I think I'm okay, but it takes us a while to think of the correct word or phrase, but some of the people seem to be able to remember straight away." (14)

There is also an early reaction to signs of disparity in overall progress, as many learners find such disparity disconcerting:

> "They can do things that I can't. One particular person seems to look at passages and remember the vocabulary several classes later. She's got a really good memory for vocabulary...." (12)

For some, the process is an exciting challenge, and one that is worth meeting:

> "...you have the additional excitement of having your brain challenged in that direction, of having to not only cope with communication itself, but also your method of communication" (19)

At the same time, however, a number of adult learners already are beginning to feel obscurely inadequate:

> "Everyone seems to be a bit more confident, and be able to answer the questions from memory, whereas I'm still having to refer to the book a lot..." (21)

In the early stages, such feelings of inadequacy tend to take the form of mild self-reproach:

> "I'm not quite sure what makes (other people) good, but they seem to know when something different has occurred, or when something has been put into a tense that mebbes it shouldn't have, and they seem to know all this and they know why things have changed, and they seem not to ask that question (that I would ask)." (27)

Feelings develop of potential isolation within the group, as the perceived prowess of the other students threatens to leave behind those who see themselves as weaker:

> "I feel apprehension that the course may prove difficult for me, and that I may not be able to keep up with fellow-students." (33)

Methods and degrees of coping with such feelings, which are brought about by being infantilized to the level of Harder's language-learning halfwit, vary from person to person. Some derive comfort from emphasizing the different approaches between the varied age-groups:

> "My results are as good as the other students, but I don't feel that I've grasped it nearly as well, whereas they may not think in terms of "have I grasped it?", but may just think "Have I got through the exam?" (3)

It takes wisdom, the courage to overcome obstacles, and repeated positive experience to strike an emotional balance:

> "I suppose part of it is you don't want to make a fool of yourself... although that doesn't really worry me, because I think in the class nobody would say Oh dear, she got that wrong... everybody's very supportive, so I don't think that happens..." (6)

As language learners, we are all prone to fantasies about the supposed superb student on the other side of the room. This has its roots perhaps in an internalised sense of competition, which can operate in our favour, in that our self-construct as successful or adequate learners can become reinforced. So too, however, can our self-construct as an incompetent, a flounderer, and that way lies disappointment and withdrawal from the learning context. This process relies upon learned ways of self-characterisation, which are embedded in our system of beliefs about our selves as individuals and about the group within which we are made to operate.

Seen from the outside, the learning group is a microcosmic system where cognition and affect are both involved, each in its own mysterious ways. Once the group has formed and stabilised to a degree, then new and recognisable identities begin to emerge. These are in part to do with the roles assumed by the different group members in their interaction, but also with the manifestation of individual character as revealed rather than as concealed. Harre's work reflects the paradox that a sense of self is gained only through social meanings - the "I" is at the centre of the microcosmic world-view. The group becomes a close community, separate from the structures of normal society, and can allow release and exploration and development of aspects of the self that are not normally accessible or permissible. Such development is known to be a feature of learning groups. We shall see in a later

chapter how the need to perform in another language enhances this type of development:

> "It's like a marriage. It's not exciting all the time. There still is the excitement, there still is the pleasure, but there is also a much deeper, friendlier, in some ways equally rewarding side to it. It is a social event, and you are working towards a common goal..." (10)

The assumption of the existence of a common goal among the members of a language-learning group is a natural one to make, but it is only true up to a point. If the goal is ever defined, it is often expressed as "a wish to learn French", for instance, without it being clear to student or tutor precisely what that is felt to mean. In the Further Education context, unfortunately, an understanding of the different potential goals implicit in the "wish to learn French" can be of crucial importance in maintaining the language group as a coherent entity and enabling the members of the group to achieve what they hope to achieve.[13]

In the context of Further Education in this country, it is not uncommon for language classes to be extremely diverse as regards age, and consequently as regards learning goals. It is unrealistic to imagine that every second-language student will want to acquire a qualification and progress beyond the present class, or even that every student will be ready to do so after the allotted time. The majority of second-language students at New College are not recent school leavers intent on acquiring qualifications that will give them access to further courses of study. There are such people, of course, and they tend to have clear learning goals, and the expectation that progress will be monitored and seen by all to be occurring, in the context of exam

---

[13] This brings us back to three very basic questions about human language. Chomsky (1986) defined the main goals of linguistic theory as an attempt to answer the following points:
1) What constitutes knowledge of language?
2) How is knowledge of language acquired?
3) How is knowledge of language put to use?
For the second language learner, the important questions to be asked in any attempt to define the "wish to learn French" must include:
1) What constitutes the language-learning goal? Is it GCSE, or A level, and if so, what grade? If it is not geared towards an examination, will it remain unexamined, unassessed?
2) In the absence of an examination, what constitutes progress, and how is it to be measured?

preparation and performance. "Learning French" in this context, might be conceived as learning how to do well at GCSE or A level French examinations, which is not necessarily the same thing.

There are not many social situations in Britain in which people belonging to vastly different age-groups, with all that this implies for differences in probable educational background, life experience and Weltanschauung, are asked to work together on terms of equality. The language classroom can be one such place, indeed, arguably, it should be. Among other things, learning someone else's language is about breaking down barriers, and making the experience of others more accessible. However, this is not to deny that it can be a disconcerting process for the young and for the old alike, and for reasons that have nothing necessarily to do with the languages that are being studied.

Some of the difficulties that inescapably arise can be seen to have their roots in notions of motivation - the student who needs an A level and needs it now, in order to progress to university or some other identified sphere of activity, as opposed to the older student who has no interest whatever in examinations, and is, in fact, determined to have nothing to do with them for reasons made clear in Chapter 4, but who does want to continue learning the language for private reasons. As fantasies begin to emerge and gain credence among the members of the group, it is easy to see how a student of either type could begin to translate a natural frustration with the difficulty of the course material into a belief that the course is geared specifically to the needs of a sub-group from which that student is excluded. This often polarises in terms of age, and it is small consolation to realise that each sub-group is equally dissatisfied, with the young exam candidates feeling that too much time is given to the language needs of the older students who are not interested in examinations, while the older ones can sometimes resent the "spoonfeeding" of the young by a tutor who is believed to be evidently more interested in the work produced by teenagers than by more mature members of the group.

Also emerging from the fact that students are differently motivated comes the feeling of other significant differences coexisting at the same time. Each age-group can be

dismissive of the other: the younger ones feel that the old students are out of touch with their reality, while the retired students can sometimes feel that the teenagers have not been alive long enough to have acquired true wisdom of any sort, and that they can therefore be either ignored or patronised, neither of which goes down well. Added to this, criticism of the performance of the young is seen as a natural part of the adult role, by students in both age-groups, and there can be a notable reluctance on the part of young students to engage in pairs-work or even group activities with older students. When such activities are engaged in, it is easy for the dominant roles in the group to be assumed by the older students, and for the younger ones to limit their participation to an acceptance of ideas and suggestions that come from the older members.

Weatherall and Potter (1989) remind us that people are not simply natural characters but performers, aware of their performance within the context of a given agenda, and capable, therefore, of falsehood and pretence. The individual that appears to be operating coherently is in point of fact fragmented into a number of possibly discordant identities as the result of pressures applied during social interaction, both internally and externally. As Foucault has put it, the subject is 'dispersed' among the various subject positions. Among the many constraints that social behaviour imposes upon us, there are some requirements that give birth to insincerity. In passing, it is worth noting that, while insincerity is frequently a reaction to stress, in the earliest stages of the second-language learning process, when stress is arguably as high as it is ever likely to be, insincerity is not an option, at least in the target language. Students do not have command of enough of the language to enable them to be anything but truthful.

In the context of the smaller group society, however, the requirements of the group give rise to elements of fantasy and play, possibly in a series of attempts to counter infantilisation. Infantilisation is a feature of the experience of group members, regardless of age, but it appears that the embarrassment that it causes is felt more by the younger members of group, who have more recently acquired adult status in their own eyes. The younger group members also have less life experience to guide them and to help them link the discoveries they make about language to a wide-reaching knowledge of the world. It may be for this reason that they appear to be more

disconcerted than the older group members at the decay of the imaginary fusion of words and things.

It may be significant, if we consider the adult language-learning group as an arena in which egos compete for airtime and in which infantilisation is to some degree affecting all the members of the group, to remember what happens in the childhood years of language acquisition. Wells (1979) has shown that over 70% of parent/child interactions in the first three years of a child's development are initiated not by the parent but by the child. The pedagogical implications of this are that early tasks, which include speech-related activities, can thus be seen to be largely determined by the child's interests. In a situation which parallels that early learning context, it would seem to be important to allow small groups the chance to set their own language agendas, and for the decision-making power within the group to be balanced in such a way as to allow all members (especially the young?) to feel that they have participated and collaborated in identifying the agenda they wish to follow..

Second-language learners are forced into a situation in which they can only use a restricted code, consisting of relatively short and simple sentences. Indeed, the code is so restricted that the earliest stages of all afford no opportunity for self-expression beyond the parameters, verbatim, of what has been taught. The input has been the same for all, but even by the end of the first session there can be marked differences in retention and assimilation of what has been seen:

> "*You feel anxious, bemused...it's difficult, isn't it? You actually* don't understand any words at all, you have to start remembering a few words and building up those few words... and there's an element of pleasure in it." (11)

Not all the difficulties are linguistic. For many beginners it is the strangeness of the surroundings, and the fact that they are asked to perform a new skill immediately, at albeit a rudimentary level, which can be disconcerting:

> "I was nervous, anxious that I wouldn't be able to cope, feeling very unsure. It was easier because I had a friend with me, and I got a bit anxious when she decided to leave, because I'm not very good with people I don't know, and I was a bit anxious about the people I would meet... just generally nervous of coming into a strange place." (9)

Fantasies can begin to undermine an already shaky confidence - the other students are in some way better, more motivated, more hard-working, or perhaps the fault truly lies with one's own inadequacies - however difference is interpreted, awareness of such difference remains an extreme threat to the continued success of some students. Of course, there are those who see such inequality as being favourable to themselves:

> "It is sort of a good feeling, and that helps you, that motivates you... when you start at the same level as everybody else you can actually achieve yourself, if you are prepared to put the hard work in you can do just as well. It's when people get the advantage by going abroad and things like that, that you can't have, that's when the gap starts to develop." (3)

It is interesting to note that although feelings of insecurity, inability to cope, personal limitation and so on may be common within the membership of a group they are essentially private feelings, and every individual has to come to terms with them. They are not something that can be resolved through an act of collective will. This serves as a reminder, if one were needed, that learning is essentially an individual process, however much it takes place in a social context. What is necessary, therefore, is for a safe atmosphere to be created, in which the group supports the individual throughout the learning process, and acts as a forum in which that learning can take place.

The ideal situation is one in which everybody in the room is prepared to take responsibility for helping everybody in the room to improve. Unfortunately, there are features of groups which militate against the performance of this task in any case, and

in terms of language learning this has to remain a hidden agenda, as the main task is one of being seen to be learning language. Sometimes, though all too often it is only towards the end of an academic year, this goal of mutual self-help and reliance can, indeed, be achieved. Even when it is achieved, group membership is often no more than a rump of what it used to be, and those who could arguably have profited most from the increased safety of a supportive group have long since fallen by the wayside. What contributes best to this goal of achieving a safe environment in which learning can take place? Feelings of safety come about through trust, and trust in turn comes about as the result of successful, unthreatening co-operation. It would seem necessary to try, therefore, to identify some of the steps that will enable students to move in this direction.

First, and most obvious, is the fact that pairs work should be introduced as soon as possible. In practical terms, this means that from the very first session, when students are learning and practising their first words in the target language, the opportunity is already there for pairs work - for an exchange of meaningful information which at the same time will pave the way for habits of mutual trust and communication. As soon as each student has seen how to convey something of who they are - this need be no more than how to say their name in the target language - then a situation exists in which pairs work can profitably be set up. The advantages of this are self-evident - not only does it allow students the opportunity to break the ice by exchanging key information about themselves as social beings while giving the target language immediate currency as a vehicle for expressing information, but it also establishes important paradigms for future successful learning. Among these are the decision to use the target language for conveying meaningful information orally, the decision to attempt to reproduce from the beginning sounds that are alien and sometimes physically difficult to mimic, (both of which are key decisions when it comes to accepting one's own share of the collective responsibility for the language learning that is going on within the group) and the frequently tacit acceptance of the importance of repeated student utterances in making the transition from self-conscious to spontaneous language use.

The pairs work should be maintained in a meaningful context. Once the pair has been established as a working tool in the learning environment, its value can be enhanced by breaking pairs up temporarily, reforming them among different members of the group and then allowing the original pairs to reform. This has a number of positive effects: it allows the student to concentrate on what is different in each exchange - the new partner's name, for instance - while still using and practising what is familiar - the language patterns necessary to elicit the response *My name is.....* Again, the frequency of repetition is important in the transition to spontaneous language use. On a social level, it allows natural social behaviour to be performed within the context of language-learning, speeds up the integration of the individual student into the group as a whole, thereby strengthening a sense of group identity, and finally allows students to reform into their original pairs where, it is hoped, they will feel safest, thereby reinforcing a sense of individual and collective achievement once the task has been completed successfully.

On the social front, the move from pairs to small groups allows a wider feeling of group safety to develop. Successful use of the target language within a number of pairs will allow a natural progression into the wider forum of the small group. This reinforces the collective acceptance of the target language as a legitimate means of expression, further strengthens feelings of group identity, and underlines feelings of achievement and progress.

An added benefit of the increased feelings of safety associated with small group work is the valuable option to use the members of those groups to form new pairs. If students become used to working with the same partner all the time, a number of unhelpful and even bizarre things can happen. Continuous work with the same partner brings with it a high level of familiarity with the accent, intonation and means of expression of the partner. Students who constantly work together have no linguistic secrets from one another, and are unlikely to surprise each other by using new vocabulary or an unexpected turn of phrase. The need for attentive listening and for the formation of constantly-revised hypotheses about the information that the speaker intends to convey is consequently reduced. The amount of thought and active engagement with the language transaction is thereby diminished. When this is taken

to an extreme, we have examples of involuntary semantic collusion in which the speaker's meaning is conveyed despite what is said. (See Chapter 4, P.10, Footnote 2) It is in no-one's interest to allow such pragmatic distortion to take place, and so enough variation of partners should be encouraged to avoid this, while always commensurate with the very necessary development of feelings of group safety and the formation of a group identity.

This is not to suggest that established pairs should be discouraged from working together, as a balance must be struck between the demands of the students as language learners, who require varieties of tone, pace, intonation and accent in order to keep thinking actively about their language tasks, and their needs as social beings who will on occasion feel threatened by the language-learning process and in need of a safe environment in which to absorb and reformulate what they have learned. To this end, established pairs must be allowed the opportunity to reform and work together . Ideally, however, as the process evolves, a given student will feel part of not just one pair, but of a number of possible alternative pairings in which safety is not felt to be an issue. Practical considerations within the FE context, such as absence through a student's illness, or through that of a member of the student's immediate family, school half-term holidays, changes in shift work etc., make it advisable to create within and around the language-learning group an environment in which the absence of one partner has little or no effect, as alternative partnerships have already been forged and are known to work.

Among adult learners, there are huge advantages to creating an atmosphere in which the majority of work is uncompetitive. At its simplest, the trouble with competitive activities within the language classroom is that the eventual emergence of a winner presupposes the emergence of an equally identifiable loser or series of losers. There are already enough factors weighing on most language learners, especially in the earliest stages of their learning, and threatening to undermine their studies. Even though language learning, in a rare combination of sound economic and pedagogical reasons, takes place in an environment in which students can interact with one another, it remains true that a language is not learned collectively. It is learned by individuals, within a collective setting. Learners learn at their own speed, and are

encouraged and inhibited by whatever language-learning history they may bring with them. They are competing all the time against themselves and against their own awareness of their inadequacies.

It is necessary, therefore, to make use of the advantages that facilitate learning and that are offered by the group environment, but it is equally essential to do everything possible to minimise the negative aspects of the group situation. Certain language games can be devised and used in such a way as to avoid the common problem of feelings of inadequacy and uncertainty, by making eventual success depend on the throw of a dice, rather than on correct language use. On the other hand, tasks can be competitive between teams within the group, formed, where numbers allow, either completely at random or according to known preferences for partners. When teams are involved competitively, there is room for individual anonymity as well as partisanship.

The role of the tutor in all this is to allow maximum exploration of the language within the restrictions of the given task. One of the many virtues of pairs and small group work is that it allows the tutor freedom of movement, freedom of participation and freedom of didactic involvement In practical terms, this allows the tutor access to the activity of the pairs/groups while that activity is in progress Student utterance is maximised because of the pairs/group situation, and the tutor is thus more able to become aware of the needs of the individual student. It also gives the tutor the opportunity to participate actively in the shared task if that seems appropriate, while retaining the option of correcting mistakes as they arise and if the correction is felt to be of crucial importance. Where correction is deemed to be necessary, it should be clear and immediate.

Successful native language use is the result of long exposure to the language, its varieties and registers. As an inevitable part of the learning process, mistakes arising from an incomplete understanding of the structure of the language are made, corrected by oneself or by others, and eventually eliminated. Once the immensely complex process of learning our own native language has been successfully completed, however, that language soon becomes the medium for the rest of our education, and

suddenly mistakes are seen in a very different light. No longer are they treated as an aid to learning, but as something to be avoided, feared, even punished. Adult learners bring all kinds of emotional and educational baggage with them to the classroom, and their attitude to the business of making mistakes is highly significant as a predictor of eventual success. Feelings of inhibition and embarrassment need to be overcome if students are to profit from the mistakes they will inevitably make. It should be stressed that at worst mistakes are diagnostic of the distance that still remains to be covered before attaining proficiency, while on occasion they should be seen as evidence of improvement (e.g. over-correction of irregular tense formations etc.)

Even when it all comes together and the working group is safe and encouraging, the task of addressing the frustrations and difficulties inherent in language learning remain there for the individual to solve, and they do not disappear even among more advanced and experienced students:

> "You feel excited. You feel curiosity. You feel de-skilled, but more in conversation. Frustration - you have to go back and dilute and filter the English until you have the Spanish for it, and that's frustrating. In a written translation the parameters are clear, and the only thing stopping me is a few words, and I can look them up... but when you're talking you don't know what you're going to say. You haven't got in front of you a kind of map that says this is your journey, and that's what you've got to try and achieve. In a conversation, I don't know what the next question is going to be. In a foreign language this is frustrating, because it holds you back." (1)

As soon as this uncertainty is spotlighted by events, as in the context of an A level oral examination, for instance, all the old fears come rushing back:

> "At that point I was feeling very stressed and I was very close to saying 'I don't want to do this.' I was on automatic pilot - beforehand it was dreadful, as I was not in control. I was afraid of appearing

> less than informed about something. Whereas during the two years of study there was no stress, because I was always in control." (1)

In point of fact, the claim to have been always "in control" is a misleading one. As users of language, we are not fully in control of what is going on, and there is a sense in which we are controlled, in turn, by the language that we use. (Argyle 1983, Lecercle 1990.) The illusion of control is an important one to establish and maintain, however, if only because the long-imagined link between word and concept has been broken with the introduction of a new language, and the entire world has been renamed while we were looking elsewhere.

> Places where the provisional nature of meaning is demonstrated are felt to be dangerous. The potential breakdown of the imaginary fusion of words and things is experienced as extremely threatening. Exposure to ambiguity leads people to search for assurance beyond the instability of language. Group members build bulwarks against being infantilised, against being taken back to an era before they understood the language of powerful adults. (Knights 1992, 18)

Nonetheless, joining an adult second-language class does mean the acceptance of a degree of infantilisation. This is complicated by the kind of make-believe involved in second-language use - let's pretend it is normal for us to practise stereotyped phrases, in Spanish, in the depths of an English winter - which can produce its own levels of discomfort and embarrassment. Classroom climate is very important. If the students are excessively aware of the threat posed by the introduction of the target language into the classroom, then strategies emerge among them which have less to do with learning the language than with minimising that threat. A case in point is how far the teacher can assume that students who are not actively participating in classroom conversation are attending to and learning from it. Audio-lingual theory implied that language learning only takes place when the students are actively performing in the language, hence the reliance on choral response techniques and, eventually, the language laboratory. However, it would be wrong to assume that students never learn unless they are overtly performing. A great deal of learning is incidental, that is,

without obvious response or reward, and that is true of second-language learning as it is of mother-tongue acquisition.

A student who feels at ease despite the element of threat posed by the use of another language is more likely to attend to any discussion between the teacher and another student, and to learn from it, and less likely to spend time merely watching for cues that the teacher might break off that conversation to ask someone else. The extent to which this is likely to happen "will depend on whether the climate of the class favours mutual dependence among the students or not." (McDonough 1981, 84). In other words, it depends on whether the student is used to conceiving the target language as something to be used as an alternative medium for communication, rather than as a series of patterns to be rehearsed - in short, whether the emphasis in the classroom is on semantics, rather than on morphology.

> In untutored second-language learning, the learning of language structures arises out of involvement in real conversational interaction, not the other way round...the nature of classroom discourse in the foreign language is clearly important.... (Hatch 1978, cited in McDonough 1981, 87-88)

Some of the implications of this approach are that various widely-held assumptions are to be challenged, among them, the notion that only grammatically correct utterances should be tolerated in the classroom. This is self-evidently wrong, as native speech is not always grammatically correct, or even coherent, in transcription, and incessant correction in the classroom can inhibit language use, even of mother tongue users. Indeed, it has been argued that this inhibition of native language use is one of the pieces of educational baggage that many adult second-language learners bring with them to the classroom, and that the factors affecting classroom language use may not be the micro-level ones immediate apparent in that situation. (Giles and Coupland, 1991)

Equally suspect is the assumption that questions should always be answered in the full form (Yes, please do compare me to a summer's day...) as though people normally spoke like that, or, indeed, as though that were the reason for asking the question in the first place. Allied to this assumption is the equally unhelpful pretence that in classroom speech teachers should only use words that have already been explained, and familiar structures. Listening comprehension ought to be about giving the students an opportunity of reformulating hypotheses, not about revisiting comfortable old friends in familiar surroundings. Very few students are going to listen creatively unless there is something new to give the stimulus an edge. To approach classroom language use like this is to deny the spontaneity of language, and to behave as though the best way to learn new structures is to study them in isolation before incorporating them into controlled patterns, rather as one might study a stuffed bird in a museum before (or, worse, instead of) venturing out into the field.

Related to this is the important question of group correction of errors, especially while playing games of different kinds. Once again, the level of group cohesion is an important factor. It has already been suggested that students and tutors must be encouraged to perceive errors as diagnostic of distance still to be covered, but also as evidence, on occasion, of improvement. This is particularly the case when it comes to the over-correcting of irregular tense formations, in which the interlanguage has clearly progressed beyond the comforting limitations of the regular verb patterns, without yet embracing the whole of the irregular spectrum. The emphasis on the positive lessons that can be drawn from error can markedly reduce the feelings of threat associated with linguistic disempowerment. While theoretically the danger might exist of excessive group cohesiveness leading to the linguistic task being virtually abandoned in place of the delight taken in intergroup relationships, the group nature of learning may offer an alternative to

> what is frequently seen as the rigid opposition between solid knowledge and objective skills on the one hand. and the personal response and creative engagement of the individual.... on the other. (Knights 1992, 3.)

Although exchanges between students in the language classroom are interpersonal, there is a strong sense also in which they go beyond the merely interpersonal and become intergroup, as language use becomes more spontaneous and more indicative of acquired skills. Giles and Coupland (1991) have argued that this factor is emancipating to the language learner in a number of ways, not least among them the need to be aware of the pitfalls inherent in all language-based communication, which depends not only on successful transmission but also on successful interpretation of the message as it is received, even though what is in fact communicated may be flawed, incomplete, or inefficiently expressed. This successful interpretation, as I have argued above, is not dependent entirely on total accuracy or even coherence in the composition or transmission of the message:

> "The best things about it are when you actually manage to say something that ...a sentence or you actually manage to express whatever it is you are going to say, and they understand you, and don't react as though it's a miracle that you've actually managed to get the words out." (12)

However partial or flawed the communication, it remains the case that language inevitably impinges in complex and crucial ways on our lives as adults within our society. Use of the target language in the classroom, however, does not reflect the eventual language-using situation. Even role-play activities tend to create a very transient situation in which the language that would possibly be used in a real context can be practised outside that context. It is still artificial. But the classroom is not just a setting for linguistic dry runs - it is a social setting in its own right, and the learning group, as Knights has pointed out, is a small-scale social system, separate from the structure of normal society but in many ways a creation of that larger one in which we operate daily, and it provides us with an opportunity to re-examine the relationship between what we simplistically oppose as the cognitive and the affective sides of our experience. (Knights, 1992)

Within that microcosm, as in the larger world outside,

> ...the main function of language is not the representation of things in the world, or the giving of 'outer' expression to already well-formed 'inner' thoughts but its use in creating and sustaining social orders. It is not so much how "I" can use language in itself that matters, as the way in which I must take "you" into account in my use of it. (Shotter 1989, 141)

In part, this has to do with the establishment of hierarchical structures and the attribution of roles within the evolving group, as every observation that we make in a given social context is

> ....shaped by our evaluation of the position from which addressees view the situation as well as by our own perspective. In other words, our utterances are designed to interact with the knowledge, presuppositions, attitudes, prejudices of our audience, as we perceive them. (Lee 1992, 12)

Language study and use is therefore pragmatic and interpersonal, and there are interpersonal relationships that evolve constantly in the situations in which people learn languages. Second-language learning groups reproduce their own cultural norms on to the structure of the groups themselves, while nevertheless having as a common task the understanding of aspects of a society which are essentially different from the cultural background against which the group has formed, and whose norms are being maintained by the evolution of the group process. A crucial focus within a language-learning class is not just the transmission of knowledge about the subject, but the fact that the actual social exchanges that are learned and practised there *are* the study. Language learning is distinctive from other disciplines, therefore, in that it internalises patterns of relatedness. It is also distinctive in that it studies an alternative and equally viable system to our own, not in order to supersede our own but to serve as an alternative when that is required, at some unspecified future date. By learning a language we are studying not our own current reality, as in the study of physics or geography, but we are preparing for some undefined future reality in which the language will become useful.

However, the fact that an important feature of first-language acquisition (Wells, 1979) is that the agenda is dictated by the interests of the child learner, means that the tutor facing a class of infantilised adults has the challenge of leading them to continue to believe that the tasks that are being worked on, attended to and talked about are in their interests to pursue. Much of the agenda in small-group work is set by the members of the group, as a result, and even if the parameters are established by the tutor or the group in advance, the ways in which these parameters are observed, distorted or ignored in practice are a result of the interpersonal and intergroup activity which we are trying to promote.

Second-language groups change in their make-up from year to year, and it is the existence of the group itself, and the sense of shared identity that that provides, which are as important as the specific composition of the group in any one year. Some students are able to bridge the gap from year to year and they can sometimes provide a core around which the new group forms itself. How the newcomers react to their presence depends on a number of factors:

> In the first year (6) and (10) seemed better than everybody, because they'd been here longer, and they had connections with the Spanish, and they seemed to know everything, but I felt as if the rest of us progressed... they didn't seem such a daunting task. They seemed to stand still - mark time, if you like - whereas I felt that we were progressing. (4)

Individual behaviour, or what we think of as the behaviour of the individual within a group situation, is to a considerable extent pre-programmed, having been worked out by previous members. The roles which have been evolved within the group, and thereby made available to its members, interlock. To take an obvious example, within a hospital context there is interlocking between the roles of the doctor and the nurse, the nurse and the patient, the patient and the porter, the porter and the doctor, and so forth. These roles both prescribe and proscribe possible patterns of behaviour within the group, and as the interlocking is not rigid as in a jigsaw but fluid, then evolution

and change in the behavioural patterns are not only conceivable, but inevitable. As James observed over a hundred years ago, in a somewhat different context, the constant interplay between the cultural conformity of the group and individual expression is beneficial to both.

> The community stagnates without the impulse of the individual. The impulse dies away without the sympathy of the community. (James, 1896)

It is also important for us to remember how much of our self-concept is imposed upon us by the language of others, and how once that concept is formed it is through our own use of language that it is revised or confirmed. Our own use of language, however, once we begin the task of learning another tongue, is about to change, and with it our own view of ourselves as successful - or otherwise - users of language. It is not a task that is lightly undertaken, or easily achieved. I am not arguing that radical reconstructions of self-concept are likely to occur, for people do not easily acquiesce in their own reconstruction in this way. This may be because we are already subject to a plurality of languages of discourse, each of which has its own Platonic ideal of what we should be and which therefore conflict, or maybe we are simply too stubbornly 'ourselves' to be reshaped. Reshaping, however, is only one of the possible forms of change. It is also possible for a language-learning experience to intensify, or dilute, feelings that were already present among the emotional baggage that we carry with us into every learning situation.

Most of our activities are habitual actions - the use of our native tongue being a prime example - and we perform them with a minimum of awareness once the necessary skills have been acquired. However, such habit patterns preclude new learning, and the resistance to changing a habit becomes critical, in that it prevents new possibilities from becoming part of our lives. The demands of the language-learning group such that the opportunities to experiment with language, and, through language, with aspects of the self, allow for exploration of normally inaccessible or prohibited areas. This has its dangers as well as its rewards, and both will be explored in the second section of this thesis, where I shall seek to structure a framework which will allow

analysis of the several stages of development in second-language competence and relate this analysis to the practical situation of second-language learning and teaching. Chapter 6, therefore, will attempt to identify who adult language learners are in the context of this study, and will examine aspects of class, age and gender as relevant factors in the language-learning experience. Chapter 7 will address the initial state of the adult second-language learner when embarking on a course of language study. Chapter 8 will offer an analysis of the development of competent performance, as evidenced by a gradual development of autonomy in the learning process as well as in language use, as the expertise develops. Chapter 9 will address the question of what represents competent performance, and what exactly it means to be a good non-native speaker of a language. There will then follow an analysis of the conditions that can be manipulated in the process of converting a novice into an expert.

CHAPTER 6

IDENTITY AND DIVERSITY - THE BACKGROUND TO THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

"Un hombre se confunde, gradualmente, con la forma de su destino; un hombre es, a la larga, sus circunstancias."[14]

(Borges, La Escritura del Dios.)

This chapter will consider some of the implications of factors such as class, age and gender on the experience of adults who are learning a second language. It will necessarily paint a broad picture, which will be refined in the following three chapters. The question to address at this juncture is what we know about the people who study languages as adults in this Further Education context, and what we can predict about them, even before the first meeting of the new language-learning group.

In the earlier chapters of this thesis I drew upon many observations that have been made on the nature and the function of language. I made reference to many books in which questions concerning language have been pondered, and I quoted some of the observations that appeared to shed most light upon the debates surrounding language itself, and upon the education of adults in particular. One branch of literature that I did not address, however, was that of the kind of texts that have been employed in order to teach languages to adult learners, and that is an omission that must now be remedied, if only because an awareness of these texts can provide insights into the assumptions made by the authors concerning the nature of society in general and the language-learner in particular.

> Your sister has a silk gown and a gold thimble. We drink Champagne wine. It is a marble pillar. They have a country house built with oak wood. She has bought silver buckles and diamond ear-rings. Have you spoken to the silk-merchant? The rich make use

[14] A man gradually blends in with the form of his destiny; a man is, in the long term, his circumstances.

of silver plate, and the poor make use of iron forks and pewter spoons. (Wanostrocht, 1820.)

Whatever else we may be able to learn from Wanostrocht and his French Grammar of 1820, the abiding message underlying these translation exercises is a clear one, and still holds good today: know your customers, be aware of their interests and aspirations, and encourage and reinforce their learning by making everything you ask them to do directly relevant to their day-to-day experience.

The sub-text of Wanostrocht's Grammar makes it plain that the author had a very definite type of student in mind - wealthy: *His coach is beautiful, everybody admires its painting and ornaments,* and with the time available to study a foreign language; familiar with the finer things of life: *The nosegay which I gathered in our garden is for her, and not for him*; likely to agree with some of the homilies that are offered as examples of good linguistic practice: *He who has for his guides consummate zeal and prudence, deserves the general esteem and applause of his fellow-citizens;* and probably showing an interested awareness of the recent European campaigns: *The battle was fought in one thousand eight hundred and fourteen, at three o'clock in the morning.*

Above all, one of the major requirements of any text or learning material must be that it should actively engage the sympathetic imagination of the learner. Over a hundred years after Wanostrocht's efforts, identical appeals to our interest lie at the heart of a text for students of Italian, which was produced as part of the Army Specialized Training Programme - translation exercises include such observations as *The soldier who fights to defend the honour of his Country is worthy of our admiration. The Commander of this regiment of infantry is a very daring officer,* and, under the heading of Conversational Exercises: *Il generale Eisenhower è americano e anche un bravo soldato - egli è il Comandante Supremo delle Forze Alleate nel Mediterraneo.* (Giudice 1944).

Although not all examples are necessarily as blatant as these, it remains true that every learning text contains a sub-text of assumptions about the people who will be using it

to study the target language. It will also contain a number of assumptions about the ways in which people learn, and, consequently, the best ways in which the target language should be presented when it comes to details of the order of presentation, the specific content of any given section, and, perhaps most important of all, what the student is expected to be doing at any given stage in the learning programme.

If Wanostrocht, seventy years earlier, was clearly catering for the relatively wealthy and leisured classes, Lemaistre's French for Beginners (Lemaistre, 1890) can be relied upon to present a different set of norms. Gone are the marble pillars and the golden thimbles. Now we are in a world in which the landmarks are very different. *Each scholar has a desk. He writes on a slate. The master writes with chalk. He writes on the black-board.* What does the scholar write on his slate, and the master on the black-board? On occasion, sentences that reflect once again the type of things that were considered important to be able to express in another language, and relevant to the accepted world-view of the time, such as *They lived in caves where they sometimes met fierce beasts, in huts or again under tents, like those of the patriarchs, Abraham and Joseph,* or even more ferociously contrived sentences in order to practise points of grammar, such as: *Have we their beautiful lilies? You have not the pheasant's nest. Thou hast the blind girl's yellow rose.*

It is interesting to note how much similarity there is in the exercises and examples contained in nineteenth-century texts, irrespective of the language that they purported to be teaching. Wanostrocht and Lemaistre were helping people to learn French. Ahn's "A New, Practical and Easy Method of Learning the German Language", published midway in date between the other two, contains exercises that would not be out of place in either: *Our best friends are dead. Which boy is the most diligent?* as well as contrived sentences to practice a given grammatical point: *Hast thou sold thy dog to thy sister?*

It is not hard to criticise these examples, but there are two important points which arise from them. The first is that any text that we choose today, for use with our students tomorrow, is already on its way to becoming as dated as Lemaistre, Guidice and Wanostrocht appear to us now. Texts can become inappropriate not because of

any necessary deficiency in the pedagogical theory which informs their composition or their presentation, as in the grammar-translation emphasis as evidenced in Wanostrocht Lemaistre and Ahn, but simply because the world has moved on since they were written.

Even so, nearly seventy years after the publication of Lemaistre's book, it had not always moved very far. We can still find echoes of the earlier assumption that the study of languages presupposed certain social markers that would be common to the learners.[15]

By the time that Boni's book appeared in 1958, these methods were clearly outdated. Direct methods of language presentation, which emphasise language learning by contact with the foreign language in meaningful situations can also date, even though the underlying principles may be highly laudable. A case in point is Harvard, with his suggestion that the introduction to the first lesson in the textbook

"may be on the following lines:

> Je cherche mes cigarettes. Ah, les voilà! Voici un paquet de cigarettes. Je le pose sur la table. Je prends une cigarette. Je cherche mes allumettes. Ah, les voilà! Voici une boîte d'allumettes. Je prends une allumette. Je frotte l'allumette. L'allumette brûle. J'allume la cigarette. La cigarette brûle. Je fume. Je fume la cigarette. Je ne fume pas de cigare.

Harvard goes on to recommend that

> the teacher may speak like this, performing the appropriate actions, for five minutes, during which time his class remains silent. (Harvard, 1961,7)

[15] Boni's Complete English-Italian Course (1958) offers these translation exercises from Lesson 3: *We are between the tailor and the doctor's uncle. I have given the dress to the housemaid.* By Lesson 48, when most modern language courses would be attempting to increase the autonomy of the learner, Boni still has these examples for translation: *His uncle has managed that bank for ten years. He held the horse and I got off. The young man clasped my hand and thanked me.*

The second point may be less immediately obvious, but it is this: within the field of adult education, those students who come to us to renew their acquaintance with a language they last studied ten, or twenty, or fifty years ago, have memories of the kind of things that were involved in those days when people talked of learning French, and the kind of text that was then employed to present the language to the student. It is highly likely that both these paradigms will have changed beyond recognition for many adult students. As we have seen, as recently as 1961 cigarette smoking was considered, by at least one author, to be an appropriate way of introducing the Present Tense of French verbs.

The world has moved on since then, and notions of what is appropriate have changed. It was not always so. Intriguingly, and the above early examples are a case in point, the syllabus of language-learning was for many years relatively unaffected by the revolutionary changes in world society: Hiugon's edition of La Fontaine's fables, first published in 1918, saw its tenth edition in 1953. Similarly, Parmée's 12 French Poets , first published in 1957, was still going strong in its ninth edition of 1971, and was described as "suitable for the upper forms of schools and for university students as well as the general reader". However, if there was a certain sameness in the demands made of generation after generation of relatively advanced language students, there was at the same time a series of revolutionary changes sweeping through the ways in which introductory languages were being presented.

What prompted these changes in the United Kingdom was, in the first instance, the move towards comprehensive education, with its emphasis on demystifying some subjects which had, rightly or wrongly, come to be seen as elitist even within the grammar school system which had promoted them. There was no room in the comprehensive school's mixed-ability groups for patriarchs or pheasants' nests, and classes were unlikely to remain silent for five minutes while their teacher explained that he was not smoking a cigar. So, although there was - and still is - much to recommend in Harvard's approach, notably the presentation of grammatical patterns through reference to everyday activities, the repetition of lexical items and of syntax, and the explanatory visual accompaniment which obviates the need for translation, all of which was perfectly valid insofar as meanings can be dramatised, the target

audience within comprehensive schools, where the majority of students were to be found, now had a different composition and the means of presentation had to change in order to reflect this.

It is therefore a fact that within the context of Further Education classes for adult learners in languages, a number of earlier traditions are likely to be represented. Some of the adults - not necessarily those who take most easily to the classes - will have a grammar-school background from some thirty or more years ago, in which languages may well have figured quite highly. Others, of similar age, will have a secondary modern background, in which languages will have had a lower profile. The older members of the group could well have experienced their only formal education in the period immediately after the war, with all that this implies for the traditional nature of the language-study approaches favoured at the time, and yet others will have a background of comprehensive school education, with its emphasis on mixed ability groups and a functional-notional approach. The students who join adult language-learning courses are likely to have very diverse educational histories, and for a number of decades varying proportions of these are certain to colour the makeup of the group. The disparate nature of the individual group members' educational experience is a factor of crucial importance when we consider the activities of the group as a whole.

In Wanostrocht's day it was relatively easy to draw up a profile of a typical adult student of languages - the sub-textual assumptions which fill the French Grammar make this plain. However, by the end of the twentieth century such attempts at portraiture have become infinitely more complicated. The question of "Who is this student?" now has a thousand possible answers. The voices of the students whose words are reproduced here make it plain that there are many variables involved which are conducive either to success or failure, and that many of these are brought into the classroom on the first night, when the students meet one another and their tutor for the first time. Indeed, the notion of the striving adult, rising on stepping-stones of his dead self to higher things, is rarely more pertinent than in the case of the adult learner, confined and yet spurred on by those aspects of our individual history which in every one of us help to form our self-image, with all that this implies.

The child is inescapably an apprentice to the surrounding culture. As adults, we are all the creatures of our environment, and as such we absorb many of the values, norms, and patterns of linguistic and social behaviour that characterise that environment. Behind this truism lurk a number of factors which are deeply relevant to the ways in which we respond as individuals to the process of learning a second language. It is also true that the child or adult who is learning another language is becoming an apprentice to important aspects of the culture of others. Not only is it " wonderful to see that it is real, outside the classroom, that there are real people who use this language and depend upon it..." (10) but also exposure to slightly different interpretations and manifestations of reality through a social context which embraces the target language, bears upon the anaesthetic effect of the familiar.

As Giles and Coupland (1991) remind us, the language that we speak and the linguistic varieties of that language are, after all, social constructs, and they owe just as much to sociopsychological (and political, and sociological) considerations as they do to the merely linguistic. Previous chapters have addressed the significance of age, and of the ageing process, since all the adult learners interviewed had that in common. In addition, however, the past and present expectations of individual learners, and consequently their levels of achievement, have also been affected by considerations of class and of gender. It is a peculiarity of the enrolment patterns at New College that no ethnic minorities are represented in the languages intake during the years in which this investigation was conducted. As a result, this thesis makes no explicit reference to issues of ethnicity as factors in adult learning.[16]

Gender and class are factors whose influence on the interviewees has been undeniable. The whole notion of class is a notion of in-groups and out-groups. Giles and Coupland remind us that language usage is one of the immediate identifiers of belonging:

[16] In point of fact, important elements from this study such as the relationship between native speaker and mother tongue, perfect and imperfect bilingualism, and class and gender issues, would provide a fascinating topic of research in the context of ethnic minorities in the UK.

> There are at least 4 reasons for the salience of language in ethnic relations: language is often a criterial attribute of group membership, an important clue for ethnic categorisation, an emotional dimension of identity, and a means of facilitating in-group cohesion. (Giles and Coupland 1991, 96)

This is borne out by student observations:

> You adapt constantly to the people you are speaking to in your own language too, as you change register and vocabulary to make other people more comfortable, to make people think me slightly less "educated" or slightly less "middle-class" - this is not about being patronising, but about picking up the vibes of the people around you...(19)

One of the more comforting results of this is that when one is speaking a foreign language, but is not thought to be a native speaker, then

> maybe I'm also less judged on a social scale, because in England people make certain judgements once you open your mouth... in Spain my voice, presumably, is less classifiable, so metaphorically I travel much lighter when I'm in a Spanish-speaking country. I've got less baggage, and I give away fewer clues to my identity, so that I'm a freer person. (19)

Wherever a class system operates within a society, one of its consequences is to structure the social expectations and socio-linguistic experiences of the members of that society in ways which are frequently contingent as much upon the class to which the individual belongs as upon individual qualities of temperament or skill. Certain patterns of language usage, certain structures and metaphors are so central to the way in which native speakers of a language express themselves, that it is impossible to acquire the language without also acquiring these ways of perceiving and conceptualising the phenomena concerned. These patterns, structures and metaphors

are in part a product of the language as a whole - English, say, as opposed to Basque - but also they vary according to the different groups which make up the highly diverse body of what we loosely term "native speakers". As the patterns and metaphors vary, so too do the details of regional dialect, involving lexical and grammatical variations, as well as differences in received standard pronunciation. As Steiner reminds us,

> Languages communicate inwards to the native speaker with a density and pressure of shared intimation which are only partly, grudgingly, yielded to the outsider. (Steiner 1975, 285)

The outsider, in this case, is not necessarily any more than the person from a different spectrum of what is nominally the same culture. In Chapter 1, I argued that notions of our own identity, just like notions of the identity of others, alter radically as the result of substituting the adjective Japanese for the other adjective English (Figure 1). This remains true also within the larger body of "native speakers", where we find significant differences in expectations and experience if we substitute, for example, the word "Cockney" for the adjective "Geordie". I must take here what Bakhtin calls "a Galilean perception of language - one that denies the absolutism of a single and unitary language - that is, that refuses to acknowledge its own language as the sole verbal and semantic centre of the ideological world" (Bakhtin 1986). It is misleading to speak of any language as though its native speakers shared a common and unique perception as to how that language should sound and be used. Equally, it would be misleading to suggest that this is a feature only of British society - one interviewee reported her childhood experiences in France:

> Q> *As a child, were you particularly aware of different languages?*
> A> Yes. My family background was of peasant stock, in the foothills of the Pyrenees, and in all the farms and villages there people spoke patois, and this was spoken by my grandmother and all her generation. When we went on weekends and holidays I heard it all the time, understood it very well, my mother spoke it to my grandmother in preference to French, because I think my grandmother was more at ease with it, and also I think because it

> seemed to them to be a more natural way of expressing themselves. I understood it, but did not speak it because I did not wish to - I felt it was sort of inferior. They felt it was threatened and to be preserved, which I now feel, regrettably, it is a bit too late. (37)

There are powerful echoes here of Steiner's observations about the use of language with those who are nearest to us:

> We speak first to ourselves, then to those nearest us in kinship and locale. We turn only gradually to the outsider, and we do so with every safeguard of obliqueness, of reservation, of conventional flatness or outright misguidance. At its intimate centre, in the zone of familial or totemic immediacy, our language is most economic of explanation, most dense with intentionality and compacted implication. Streaming outward it thins, losing energy and pressure as it reaches an alien speaker. (Steiner 1975, 231)

Everything that has been said so far about the "native speaker" must now be seen in the light of great variation in what this term may mean from region to region of a linguistic community and within sub-sections of such a community. The idiosyncrasies of personal usage, the immediate social circle in which this usage finds a sympathetic audience, the broader social contexts which require shifts of register, regional variations in lexis and pronunciation - all these form an ever-widening series of contexts for the individual utterance, spreading like a ripple across the surface of a pond. How far that ripple is allowed to spread has in some considerable measure to do with the social class to which the speaker belongs. The differences go far beyond the merely linguistic, as

> the question of perspective is clearly bound up with that of social identity. The components of our social identity - social class, ethnicity, gender, age and so on - have a crucial bearing on our experience of and relationship to social processes. (Lee, 1992, 12)

Our view of ourselves as belonging to a particular class, which tends to be reinforced by others, will therefore set parameters for our own activities. There are certain things that we are expected to do, and there are certain types of behaviour which are deemed inappropriate for people of our class, whatever that may mean. Class is arguably a powerful determinant of educational prospects and opportunities, and of the subjects studied, the level to which they are studied, the expectations of teachers and pupils alike with regard to what people need to be taught and what constitutes success:

> At school I did only very basic French. As with all my languages, when I started to study it in the classroom there were difficulties that I had to conquer.... the grammar etc. I'd only done CSE's at school and I'd only learned English to that level, and I had to buy myself English grammar books and teach myself English grammar so that I understood the significance of all the grammar terms. *(4)*

If we contrast that student's experience with what follows, we can see one of the effects of these differences in experience:

> Q> *What subject do you think you were 'best at' as a child?*
> A> English, I suppose. English was the subject that appealed to me most.
> Q> *Is that the same thing?*
> A> Oh I think so, yes. If you're not interested, I don't think you can really be... give your best of it..
> Q> *Has your interest in English made your subsequent studies of languages any easier?*
> A> Yes. I consider I had a very good grounding in English, and what you talk about a gerund I know exactly what you're talking about, which present-day children don't seem to know.... (7)

There is a powerful sense in which language *per se* is a substantially different thing for people with different educational backgrounds, even within the broad parameters

of what we call native speech. We need look no further for evidence of this than the words of these two people who are reporting how it feels to try to use an unfamiliar language:

> It (being corrected by the teacher) makes you remember, so you don't make the same mistake, but you do feel mebbes a bit embarrassed sometimes.... I think I'm okay, but it takes us a while to think of the correct word or phrase, but some of the people seem to be able to remember straight away. (14)

> I think there's also a physiological aspect... you are helped by the actual placing of the sounds through the articulatory organs, and because the rhythms and stresses and intonations are in fact very different, and if you respond to these then automatically your own body language and gesture will tend to change. I also feel that this doesn't simply apply to the speaking of a foreign language, even native speakers of the same language will in fact have their own supersegmental patterns which are rooted basically in each individual personality and each individual psyche, and it's simply that in speaking a foreign language these are more pronounced, more noticeable. *(36)*

It is manifestly the case in the above examples that differing class experiences of education affect what is to come to us in later life. They also affect the levels of confidence that we have in our selves as users of our native tongue, and thus our perceived ability to affect the world that surrounds us through our use of language. In concrete terms, certain types of experience will allow us to see ourselves as skilful when it comes to language use, and able to argue with others and persuade them, thereby obtaining what we want by means of discussion rather than force. The reverse of this is that certain other experiences will lead us to see ourselves as hesitant or inept with language, allowing others to dictate to us. We see ourselves becoming unable to obtain what we want, and having little or no alternative but to fall in with the demands and expectations of others. There is no equality in this - one is either on the up side or

on the down, and the experiences are very different, dealing as they do with empowerment and disempowerment. With children learning, and with adults in a learning community, there is an intimate and shifting relationship between control by the self and control by others.

We can also expect there to be further correlations with our levels of success in understanding other subjects that are presented to us through the medium of English, as well as in our expectations of success or failure in the study of other languages, whether as children or adults. For those to whom language itself is not a barrier to the understanding of other subjects, there is the awareness of an ability to interpret and make sense of specialist terms, learning new ones if need be, and a confidence in one's ability to learn. The process of studying a new language will therefore be perceived as an acceptable combination of what is enjoyable and what is challenging. At the other end of the spectrum, if we are not sure of the meaning of what is being said to us, or if explanations are not clearly understood, then specialist terms become an obstacle to progress, and learning a new language becomes a threatening activity rather than a pleasurable one. These are the extreme ends of the spectrum. We, as individuals, are rarely to be found consistently at one end or the other, but different aspects of our responses will appear at different points along that spectrum. However, it is already clear that for those approaching either end of that spectrum the second-language learning experience is very different.

The catchment area from which New College draws its adult students is socially diverse. Major employers in Durham City include the University, the Land Registry, the Department of Social Security, National Savings and the Home Office in the shape of Durham and Frankland prisons and the Low Newton remand centre. Around the city itself, there are large numbers of ex-mining villages which have seen their pits close comparatively recently. Not only coal mining, but other local industries such as steel-making at Consett, ship-building and the North Sea fishing industry, have experienced enormous difficulties and changes in the space of the last two generations, and the area has had to adapt to all these changes, as have other regions of the country, as part of a wider social trend from one generation to another. Many of the students (25%) interviewed identified their parents' way of living as belonging to

the working-class, while identifying their own life-styles as middle-class. However, 70% of those interviewed still claimed to belong to the same class as their parents, with 32.5% identifying themselves and their parents as belonging to the working class.

For the working-class parents of today's adult students, the opportunities for travel outside of wartime were few and far between:

> My parents didn't have the opportunity. In fact my father has never been abroad. My mother didn't go abroad until after my father died, and then she was well into her seventies. And she went to Spain! (10)

Indeed, as one student dryly observed,

> In mining villages there was not a great deal of perceived need for the ability to speak a foreign language. (11)

Against that background, and against the need for young adults in a relatively poor part of the country to be learning a trade and bringing in some money, normal priorities did not necessarily include a high level of academic studies:

> Father encouraged me to go on at school. My mother probably wouldn't have done, being a local girl, a miner's daughter, but my father was from the Midlands, and he had a bit more idea of what was necessary to get on in life, I think. (9)

For working-class children born in the north of England after the war, foreign travel, and therefore exposure to other cultures and other languages, was often something other people did:

> We never went for foreign holidays... we knew there was foreign countries but we never knew much about the languages, and I think

> it wasn't until I started the grammar school that I started to do French and Latin, and I was aware of languages. (34)

This awareness of the existence of foreign countries and of cultures other than our own often appears, even for those who were attracted by it, to have been a theoretical one, unclouded by first-hand experience and unconstrained by any practical considerations of what these differences might mean:

> Barrow is a very insular little place, with very few foreigners around of any sort, but I was desperately keen to learn French.... People used to ask me what do you want to be when you grow up, and I used to say Italian, for some strange reason... (35)

> When I was a child, only rich people went abroad, only rich people flew in aeroplanes. In the 60's we went to the seaside, Skegness, and Margate. If we heard people speaking a language, speaking French, we wouldn't be curious to find out...we'd know it was foreign, but my parents would just think, "They're foreigners, full stop." (1)

Not only was foreign travel considered somehow irrelevant to the experience of a normal working class child, but so too the wider educational experience was all too often seen as offering a doubtful return. Even in grammar schools, expectations were often limited and decisions that affected people's lives could be taken in a very offhand manner:

> I didn't think you were allowed to go to university if you were working class, and then I found out that I was because my French teacher was also the careers teacher, and he said, "OK, you're in 5A, what university do you want to go to?" and I didn't know you could. And he said "Oh, yes, you're in 5A. So you've got to." So I thought I'd do French then. (35)

At the other end of the scale, this student, who identifies herself as coming from a middle-class background, was highly aware of language varieties as a child, and continued through adolescence and into adulthood to study a foreign language, in this case French:

> My father's side of the family was French, and we used to go to France most Summer holidays when we were kids, and visit my auntie on the way to wherever we were going in France. It was always somehow exotic to me to hear my father and his relations speaking French, and also I wanted to be a part of it, so in that respect I suppose I wanted to learn it so I could do it too. (12)

Other interviewees who consider themselves to have been brought up against a middle-class background also reported early awareness of other languages, as a result of having been exposed to it in a number of ways. In some cases it was as the result of seeing family members make use of languages other than English:

> Very often we had foreign guests in the house, and I realised that people communicated in different ways. We also had the occasional au pair to help out, and I remember being taught to count in French at bathtime. I also remember that I acquired a really awful accent in the counting. I don't know how... When I first learned French again in school it all came back to me but in this rather bizarre accent... (19)

In other cases the childhood exposure to languages came about as a result of deliberate parental policy:

> I began to study other languages in the usual way, by having to study them at school, though with a faux début - in the sense that my parents sent me to a private tutor down the road to learn French when I was 8 years old. Memories of this are extremely vague - I don't think it was a productive process. The other languages I

> studied were French and then Latin, and much later on, Spanish (20)

However, for the preceding generation, exposure to foreign cultures was no guarantee of success, or even interest, when it came to learning the languages concerned:

> I think they tried to see themselves as lower middle class or something like that, as they were both very fine, upright outstanding English citizens in the 50's... my father was very much the senior NCO of the Royal Navy.... he travelled perhaps even more than I did, and never tried to learn a language once, and when he moved to southern France it was comical listening to him trying to communicate in French... (4).

Childhood experience of the Armed Forces was not invariably a limiting factor, however, as it could lead to levels of exposure to other cultures and languages which would have incalculable consequences later on:

> My father... well, all my family, we've got a very RAF background, and it all started stemming from then, when I was younger we lived in Germany, there was a lot of family background and then it carried on studying in school, specially with my German, which is my other language. Of course I enjoy them, and they're very sort of help me, *(sic)* when I go round travelling, and I actually have family background in so much that my step-mother is German, and my father married a German about 2 years ago now. (22)

There is a widespread awareness among respondents that there have been substantial changes in British society in the post-war period, and that among these changes there is an enormous improvement in the overall standard of living for many people, so that many interviewees, especially people above fifty years of age, describe their life-style and their standard of living as substantially better than those of their parents. Along with this generalised trend comes an increased awareness of a wider world, of

language and cultural variation within the parameters of our common humanity. Perceptions of ourselves and of others have altered radically in some cases as we move from one generation to another:

> I remember something my mother said about him (a great-uncle who had fought in the Battle of the Somme) when the Second World War started: he said that all Germans were blue, and everybody in this little village in County Durham believed him, that they all had blue skin. He'd presumably seen lots of dead Germans.... (4)

Not all changes have been quite so radical:

> A> I would say we are working class.
> Q> *And how would your parents describe their way of living?*
> A> They would say they were working class as well.
> *Q> Does the term "working-class" mean the same to you as it did to your parents?*
> A> No, I think to my parents working-class would have been the factory workers, which they weren't, of course, but we undoubtedly have a much better standard of life and of living than they had.
> Q> *And is this part of a general post-war trend?*
> A> Yes. (7).

For others, wherever they may feel their social roots to have been, there is the definite feeling that they now belong to a class which differs significantly from that of their parents:

> Q> *How would you describe your way of living, your class?*
> A> Lower middle-class.
> Q> *And how would your parents describe their way of living? What class were they?*
> A> They were working class.
> Q> *So there's been a shift?*

A> A tremendous shift, yes. I don't think languages have had anything to do with it... it's the first generation going to university, and my father had very definite ideas about the value of education... that's what he wanted for his children and so we've kind of gone up in the world, compared with them. (6).

We are dealing here with aspects of social identity, and in particular with the individual's development of a sense of personal sameness and continuity which is based, in part, on a belief in the sameness, continuity and value of a shared world view. The growth of a sense of identity depends on the past, present and future - in other words, on an awareness of both stability and change as powerful forces which operate on us. For some interviewees, the shift away from the childhood identification with the class to which the parents belonged is simply a fact, that brings with it a number of advantages:

Q> How would your parents describe their way of living, or their class?

A> They were working class, and they didn't have the education I've had. The opportunities for education - this is what has altered our class. And our children of course accuse us of being middle class.... (10).

For other students, however, this stretching of the class roots creates feelings of unease and dissonance:

Q> How would you describe your way of living, your class?

A> I'm working class. I say that because I'm an inverted snob. I have a very middle-class job, but my feelings, my mentality, are very working class.

Q> *How would your parents describe their way of living?*

A> Working class. Definitely working class. (1.)

Chapter 5 has already reported on the experiences of adult learners at the beginning of a course of second-language study, and we have seen how adulthood and increasing age have implications for the learning process. If we consider the experience of adult learners, not from the point of view of the physical or mental implications of relatively advanced age, but simply the experiential value of a lifetime's activities, we can see that, just as mother-tongue fluency can cause interference in the learning and use of the second language, so too the past educational experiences of the adult learner can interfere with the learning process now. Adult learners have memories of what they believe learning ought to be, what teaching ought to be; they have memories of the importance given to error, the consequent fear of inaccuracy, the immediacy of failure, the threat of examinations which by virtue of their anonymity allowed for no appeal, no clemency, and no explanation of what had been intended but insufficiently well conveyed. These are compounded by the feelings of comparative physical and mental decline, the relative lack of energy, and the concern that they might not be able to keep up or compete, as though communicating with other people could only be presented or achieved in terms of a competition. On the other hand, several students reported their belief that study at a relatively advanced age was not only a good thing in itself, but a way of warding off the ravages of forgetfulness:

> *Q> I have one student who is doing an A level course, and who is repeating the A level course for the I don't know howmanyth year, who is quite convinced - she's a lady of about your age - that studying a language helps to keep memory problems at bay.*
> *A>* Yes, that was another part of the reason why I came, why I started the French in the first place, because I thought that if I had something that I had to think about it would keep my mind active and perhaps delay this memory loss. I think this is so. (9)[17]

Not all adult students admit to feeling any change in their abilities to adapt to the demands of a new language:

[17] Aged 69 at time of interview.

> I have not found concentration a problem, how some people say when you're young you pick it up quicker. I don't know if it does make a difference but even if it does I think motivation probably counteracts that as you get older. Even when you feel you are motivated, over the course of a year that doesn't go on an even line either - some weeks I might spend a lot of time on it, but other weeks I spend nil. *(2)*

For many adult learners the difficulties inherent in the learning of a second language are endemic, and have more to do with the sheer complexity of the learning task:

> *Q> Does time have more to do with it...is it because it happens so quickly, that it's up to you to make it happen quickly?*
> *A>* You might know the facts, you might know the grammar but it's difficult to get it to come out fluently, and in the right order, without a lot of practice, which is what you don't get...you don't have the time. (5)

There are practical considerations as well, that need to be taken into account, and an awareness that realistically it is unlikely that anyone will be able to learn another language only through classroom study, and without considerable exposure to the target language in the country where it is spoken:

> I suppose it isn't all positive if you don't make the progress you expect to make. I see people coming to the class who probably haven't been studying it as long and who are better than I am but I've got to the stage in my life where that doesn't worry me greatly... I feel almost everybody's better than me... I think if I were a schoolchild that would be extremely discouraging, but I've got to the stage where I think well, I do the best that I can and I'm enjoying it, and I'm gaining something... and if I'm not quite as good as someone else, well, so be it. (6)

On the other hand, as reported in the interviews, the age of other members of the group outside the 16-19 age range, was simply not an issue. I have reported elsewhere (Watts, 1991) the imbalance in student reaction when faced with group members of significantly different ages. However, while it has been seen to be sufficient among young students (16-19) for a group member to be in their thirties in order to be seen as old and therefore different, probably more skilled and more likely to try to dominate proceedings, among adult groups of widely varying ages it is only that same 16-19 age group that is singled out as being somehow different, and worthy recipients of what is considered by the adults to be benign and helpful advice, though this is frequently resented by the young who see it as patronising interference. For the most part, the difference of a decade or two in the ages of indisputably adult members of a group does not in itself appear to be seen as significant. People in their thirties claim to identify more with those who are older than they are, rather than with the 16-19 year-olds, and this judgement is supported by the 16-19 year-olds themselves, as well as by group members at the other end of the age spectrum.

The normal considerations affecting pairing and the choice of partners, however, apply as much at adult level as at any other, and students choose to associate more with the people who appear to have most in common with themselves - age is a clear identifier in this, and the tendency is for people of similar ages to form study partnerships, rather than to exercise the choice of working with someone of a significantly different age. It is also the case that in many instances adult learners already come in pairs, and rely upon a pre-existing friendship to help them through the traumas of the learning experience:

> It's like marriage - it's not exciting all the time. There still is the excitement, there still is the pleasure, but there's also a much deeper, friendlier, in some ways equally rewarding side to it. It's because it's a social event, and working towards a common goal. (10)

While this is frequently helpful in the early stages, all too often if one of the pair decides for whatever reason to drop out of the class, the other one disappears as well.

There are certain physical, mental and social preconditions, outlined in Erikson's developmental stages, which contribute to the formation of a sense of identity and without which this cannot develop (Erikson, 1959). One of the features of adult second-language learning is, as we have seen, that certain aspects of the learner's self-concept are called into question, and that the learner, infantilised and called upon to perform in substantially different ways from what has come to be considered normal, finds even such basic elements as professional or individual adult competence to be challenged, and, what is more, to be challenged in a public forum. It has been suggested that the notion of identity achievement is essentially a bourgeois concept, and that the investigation of an identity paradigm has been carried out traditionally

> within that population identified as white college-educated males living in Western societies ..... the bulk of whom were drawn from N. American colleges and universities. (Marcia 1966, 119)

Identity as such is notoriously difficult to define, as it is highly complex. As the process of learning another language unfolds, beginning with the bestowal of a new identity in the sense of a new name, at least, (See Chapter 5, *Je m'appelle Jean...*) and although many aspects of the search for a sense of that renewed and enriched identity beyond the level of the mere name are conscious, unconscious motivation may also play a major role.

> Perhaps it's like dressing up. Suddenly you put on a different outfit, or perhaps like people who are on the stage, with the right clothes and the right walk, they say they feel different... so perhaps as I start using different language I feel different in that way... another skin, in a way. (10)

It is at this early stage that feelings of acute vulnerability may alternate with great expectations of success, as we have seen. However, as the average experience of language learning is a female experience, in schools, and this is mirrored at university, it is those identity-related concerns that afflict - not exclusively, but especially - women, that become involved in this aspect of the language-learning task.

For some women, success in learning foreign languages can restore a sense of self-worth, and this is, in no small measure, a result of the difficulties involved in reaching a certain level of proficiency:

> Language study is very positive. It gives you self-respect, it gives out vibes to different people when you are speaking it... when I was abroad I found that people were looking at me thinking oh, she's English, but she knows another language, and the best thing about learning a language is that you realise that it *isn't* as easy as you thought it was, especially now I've done German fluently and I'm on to Spanish, and it is getting difficult. (22)

It has long been argued that women's experience of education as a whole has been not only different but inferior, in many ways, to the experience of men. The educational background of a given student, then, can be expected to reflect not only their class, but also their gender, and it would appear that once again within any given class it is the men who enjoy some advantage. Foreign language instruction is unique in that it has its foundation in the knowledge of the native language. Not only is it the medium through which new material is often explained, it is also, and at the same time, both the yardstick by which we measure success, and, at least in terms of interference, one of the major obstacles to fluent and coherent use of the target language. The class implications are considerable and, as the bulk of the respondents in this project were women who identified themselves as having had a working-class background, whatever their current standards of living might have been, we see that the identities subject to the strains inherent in the infantilisation associated with the early stages of language learning, being predominantly female, had additional layers of stress.

Not, of course, that all adult students who embark on a beginners' course are true beginners. It is normally easier to teach someone anything from the very beginning, than it is to deal with what has been imperfectly learned, understood, or remembered from past exposure to the subject. With adult learners this is even more the case, as imperfect retention can be coupled with feelings that not only have teaching methods

changed but that even the nature of the skills that are required has become more of a challenge.

> *Q> What languages have you begun to study as an adult?*
> A> Spanish, and one year of French. There was a gap of 49 years between school French and my adult course. (9)

For this student, aged 69 at the time of interview, the GCSE course in French that she had followed, successfully, a year before the date of the interview had been almost unimaginably different from the French course that she had studied in her teens during the Second World War. Since that time there had been a progressive shift in emphasis away from rote learning, together with a decline in translation and dictation as methods of examining candidate performance. With the movement towards the functional-notional approach which underpins contemporary language teaching, the skills involved in becoming "good at French" were now completely different from what they had been half a century before. As a result of these changes, the demands of adapting to this radically altered perspective were an additional obstacle for the student concerned. This case is an extreme one only because of the length of time involved. All adult students who return to language study have to make an adjustment to allow for interim changes in pedagogical theory and practice.

Sadly, some things appear not to have changed a great deal. Many adults report feelings of distress at the way in which they were criticised for making mistakes when they were children, and for many adults this underlies an attitude towards their own language use which can inhibit experiment with a second language. One of the reasons for being frightened to make mistakes has to do with our education system, which instilled in earlier generations the notion of a standard version of English as the norm, and marginalized variations on that standard as impurities. While this appears to have diminished, at the same time there is sometimes a curious ambivalence towards the spectrum of accuracy/inaccuracy, such that what is welcomed as a creative use of the language in certain circumstances can be criticised as just plain wrong in others.

This chapter began by raising the question of who these people are who study languages. As we have seen, groups of learners can be enormously disparate in their composition. Age and educational history vary enormously, and prison officers, housewives, scientists and welders all bring their vastly different life experience to the classroom, which is the common forum for all their learning. The need for every member of the group to feel safe within it can not be exaggerated.

> If I got something wrong, I was made to feel small, and stupid, and the same thing happened if I asked a question. I was supposed to know these things without asking, although they had never taught us at GCSE. After a while I just stopped asking, and I wouldn't open my mouth in the Spanish lesson... (41)

Such feelings were reported commonly among adult learners who were recalling conditions that applied to their own childhood. These attitudes may be brought into the classroom by the adult learner, and reinforced by the tutor, and need to be overcome. However, the fact that not everything has changed for the better is clearly evidenced in this instance, for the interviewee in this case, a girl of nineteen, was describing the way things were as recently as 1996, in a local secondary school.

There will be the need to draw out some of the pedagogical implications of this huge diversity in Chapter 10. Before then, we should address the language-learning process among adults as it takes place against the background of this diversity. The next three chapters in this section will address the experience of beginners, intermediate and advanced students.

CHAPTER 7

THE BEGINNER'S EXPERIENCE

And this is the upper sling swivel,
which in your case you have not got....

(Naming Of Parts. Henry Reed)

The first meeting of an adult second-language learning group involves many hopes and fears, mostly unexpressed, and many of which have their origins and their roots in the self-image of the participants. This chapter will explore the characteristics of the early stages of second-language learning, and the strategies for coping and progressing adopted by adult students.

We have already seen the effect of mother-tongue deprivation on our expressible identity. There are good reasons why the first things that we learn in a new foreign language involve restoring to us some measure of what we have lost. Students of a second language are attempting to break away from the powerful hold that mother-tongue performance has over us all. As soon as we can say what our name is and one or two things about ourselves, the first hurdle has been cleared and the new language is seen as marginally less threatening than before.

Not only that, but in the very first lesson it is not too difficult to remember everything that is expected of us. *Je m'appelle Jean...* has an enormous number of virtues. As a statement, it is excitingly true and untrue at once, for the name has been translated into a different linguistic context, and the identity somehow given an extra elasticity (I am someone who now answers to the names of both John and *Jean*). As a declarative act, it identifies the speaker as one who can communicate some information by means of alien sounds and be understood by native speakers of those sounds. A communicative door has been opened.

By the same token, of course, another one has been closed, as the statement *Je m'appelle Jean* has little currency with other mother-tongue speakers outside the classroom where it has been learned and used. This statement, which would convey information in France, distances the speaker from other members of the society who do not share the knowledge needed to interpret it. That knowledge is shared by the other members of the learning group, however, and statements made in the target language thereby acquire a dual legitimacy - not only do they allow an element of communication in the new language to take place, but they also serve to reinforce the relationship between one learner and another as members of a group that has a task and an identity of its own. It is also important to recognise that there is continuity between the way in which language is acquired and the ways in which it is used - that it is at once the message and the medium.

In the very earliest stages of learning a new language, there is relatively little room for error. As long as all you know is, for instance, a greeting in the target language, there is little risk of your getting it significantly wrong. You will either remember it more or less accurately, or you will not. In either event, there will be little interference from your native language because the volume of manipulable target language at your disposal is so small. It is not unlike learning to juggle with a single ball. It is not a difficult trick, but neither is there great public demand for it. Indeed, it may be argued that it hardly counts as juggling at all. Where the motivation and the determination and downright courage are called for lies in the business of learning to juggle more complex combinations.

Two major forces conspire to make this juggling difficult. The first is the intrinsic strangeness - the unfamiliarity - of the new language, and the fact that everything in the world has been renamed. The second is the prior existence of a native language and a set of learned behaviour patterns which involve the automatic and immediate use of that language as a spontaneous reaction to the need to communicate.

> When you start a language from scratch you feel quite vulnerable.
> My feelings haven't changed, as I still feel like that (After 7 weeks)

> Everyone seems to be a bit more confident, and be able to answer the questions from memory, whereas I'm still having to refer to the book a lot. (21)

As soon as students are temporarily deprived of the use of their mother tongue, then their ability to communicate is powerfully circumscribed by their own private second-language thesaurus, as well as by that of their interlocutor, which may well not match their own. On the other hand, the second-language novice has a problem which goes beyond that of lexis - the words in between the lexical landmarks, that obey, apparently at random, obscure syntactical rules. Mere vocabulary, then, is not enough, as the grammatical framework within which that vocabulary allows theoretically transparent communication to occur, is also to prove an essential acquisition:

> I know in my head what I want to say, but I can't... I seem to sort of stumble it out and I'm embarrassed, really, that you're not... getting it across properly. Self-conscious, I would think..... I think some people are more confident in another language. But I get embarrassed and not very confident. (34)

A second level of difficulty then becomes apparent - the adult second-language learner already possesses a grammatical framework which has always been adequate in the past. Part of the problem for the second-language learner is the fact that there is already in existence a system of word-forms and syntactical structures that is intimately bound up with our selves as both individual and social beings. This is not to suggest that adult learners share a common level of command over their mother tongue, that they necessarily use it in the same ways or that they feel equally at ease with it. Social marking will affect the ease or difficulty with which the performance of a cognitive task can be affected, by the extent to which the details of that task can be mapped on to norms or rules with which the child/adult is familiar . (Edwards and Mercer 1979)

Whatever the relationship between the adult student and the mother tongue, this system has to be held in abeyance for the second language to emerge. Our native

language and the cognitive discovery of the world's meaning go together, while our learning of a second language is not accompanied in this way (except for self-centred, i.e. language-based, cognitive discovery). In the second language, in other words, adult cognitive development relates primarily to the language itself, rather than to any major reflection, through language, of the outside world. The exception to this is that adult students do become aware of some aspects of the cultural background to the language they are studying, and this is greatly to be encouraged. However, these new cultural insights are rarely detached from the study of the language, and are not necessarily absorbed into the student's overall world-view in the same way that cognitive discovery is absorbed in childhood.

Indeed, the order of acquisition has everything to do with the order of presentation of the learning materials, and this in turn results from certain decisions that have been taken by the authors of a course, or by the tutors responsible for delivering that course. These decisions in turn are based upon preconceptions about who the learners are (See Chapter 6), and which functions of the target language are going to be most useful to the learners, as well as being easiest to convey in a classroom situation which, in the Further Education context, has always involved the need for mixed-ability teaching. However, the communicative frustration and helplessness of the second-language learning adult in the early stages of study are reminiscent of infancy, and evoke emotional responses in the learner that frequently stem from earlier learning experiences and factors other than the purely linguistic.

This frustration has its immediate roots in an inability to communicate, to convey meaning and to understand the significance of what is being said. With regard to reception, in the early stages, second-language use is much less complex than mother-tongue usage, because there is no awareness of irony, homophone, polysemy, and no chance of alternative meanings being conveyed or, indeed, considered, because the student's knowledge of the new language is so limited. For these things to become problematical requires a relatively advanced state of second-language awareness . Broadly speaking, the message either is received and understood, or it is not.

Nevertheless, "The living phrase, spoken by the living person, always has its subtext; there is always a thought hidden behind it." (Vygotsky, 1987, 281.) and when it comes to productive language use, adult second-language learners have problems with articulation of their ideas in the foreign language, and the intended message can simply overload their current capacity for planning and delivering speech. The options are few in a case like this, and many students decide to give up and say something simpler. While this simplification or falsification of the originally intended message does allow communication to take place, it can still be immensely frustrating, especially for an adult who wished to be recognised as an intelligent human being.

> There's that touch of anxiety, that worry about embarrassing oneself by either getting it wrong or suddenly not being able to understand... there's also a deal of frustration when you realise that you can't actually say what you want to say..... There's always a bit of self-consciousness involved. (11)

Self-consciousness is a constant theme in the observations of the interviewees. While this is not typical adult behaviour while operating in mother-tongue, it is reported as a common feature of early second-language use. There is an observation of the self, and an evaluation of the self's performance in the target language, which is normally absent in mother-tongue. The cause for this, as noted in Chapter 3, lies in the fact that meaning is an effect of language, not a presence within or behind language, and the effect is unstable and uncontrollable. Successful language learning involves a transition in the status of the language studied from being the object of study to becoming the subject of knowledge - a source of cognition surrounding cognates other than itself. Hence the value of learning the language where it is spoken, as once again the opportunity to do so implies no break in continuity between the acquisition and the use of the language. Overall, the second language differs from the mother tongue in that it has a different relationship to the learner's total experience of life, forms a less integral part of that experience, and is chronologically a comparatively late thread in it. Moreover, it has its foundation in the learner's awareness of their mother tongue, and reflects a sort of 'self-consciousness' of second-language use.

Studies of bilinguals in a picture-word interference task showed that

> lexical items from different languages are closely and automatically connected in semantic memory and the bilingual cannot turn off his inactive language. (Ehri and Ryan ,1980, 299.)

Albert and Obler (1978) produced evidence to suggest that second or subsequent languages are processed to a greater extent by the "non-dominant" hemisphere than are mother tongues, particularly at the early stages of second language development. Moreover, more recent research with functional magnetic resonance imaging suggests that "late" bilinguals - those who become so as adults - process their linguistic information in spatially separated regions of Broca's area of the brain, (Kim et al, 1997) whereas bilinguals who became so in childhood process all their linguistic information in the same region of Broca's area. (Klein et al, 1995; Kim et al, 1997) As our aim is to enable adult students to achieve some belated measure of bilingualism, then it would appear that, as we can not turn off our inactive language even once we have reached the bilingual state, the risk of interference is an ever-present one. Many English speakers are monolingual, which is a situation somewhat unusual in the world at large. For most of them, unlike, say, for most Swiss, there has been little or no provision since childhood for the brain to deal with two or more languages. Steinberg argues that among those who are bilingual, there are marked differences in demeanour according to the language which is being used, although to assume that this is merely a function of language *per se*, rather than language use within a social context, is rather to miss the point:

> The average Swiss speaks German woodenly. His prose is stilted, heavy and lifeless.....The same man using dialect in his 'local', chatting away and laughing, is simply another human being, easy, often very funny and spontaneous. (Steinberg, 1976, 102.)

There has long been debate as to how bilinguals or polyglots arranged and processed lexical and syntactical information. The debate has centred on the lateralization of language processing, and on whether bilinguals store information centrally and have

equal access to it in both languages, or whether information storage is somehow organised by language and involves two separate mental lexicons.

There is evidence from a number of studies to suggest that the left hemisphere of the brain is dominant for processing the native language as well as the non-native language of the bilingual speaker. Other studies, however, have reported weaker left lateralization for language among bilinguals; still others have reported differential hemispheric asymmetry for language in the bilingual speaker (Obler, 1982)[18]

The critical factors in lateralization within the language-learning process appear to be subject selection, the age at which the student acquired the second language, and the manner of that second-language acquisition. In addressing the first of these, it has been suggested that bilinguals rely on the right hemisphere to a greater extent in processing a new language in the early stages of learning, but as proficiency increases, the left hemisphere will be engaged to a greater extent. This stems from the belief that language components such as content words and prosodic features, on which beginners typically rely more than they do on function words and the phonetic elements of speech comprehension, are within the competence of the right hemisphere. However, although there is some evidence to support the stage hypothesis, there is other evidence suggestive of equivalent patterns of hemispheric asymmetry in both first and second languages of non-proficient bilinguals.

A second important factor is the age at which the second language is acquired. Proficient bilinguals typically acquire both languages during infancy, while non-proficient bilinguals typically begin their second-language acquisition during adolescence or later. If the two languages of a bilingual are acquired successively, the brain will be at different stages of physical and cognitive maturity with respect to the learning of the two languages, and there may thus be differences in the processing strategies used during the acquisition of the first and second languages:

> Together these two factors lead to the prediction that hemispheric asymmetry in bilinguals will more closely resemble that of

> monolinguals the earlier the acquisition of a second language takes place. (Springer and Deutsch 1989,)

The third consideration is the manner of language acquisition -that is, whether it is acquired informally, with an emphasis on content rather than form, which would imply less left-hemisphere participation, or formally, with increased emphasis on the isolation of rules and the correction of error, which would imply greater involvement of the left hemisphere.

In the matter of lexical storage, Kolers (1963) and others have supported the two-store position, while Segalowitz (1977) and others have argued for a single-store hypothesis or at least a single integrated network. Cross-language interference has long been taken as indicative of a single-store mechanism, although, as ripples do not spread only in one direction, it is possible for interference to occur in a two-store model as well.[19] However, Kim et al (1997) appear to have shown that speakers of more than one language process those languages in different parts of Broca's area of the brain when they are thinking in those languages. This is clearly suggestive of a two-store mechanism, although it does not preclude integration between those two stores.. Paradis (1981) has proposed some kind of compromise, according to which the languages are stored in a single extended system, but the elements of each language form separate sub-systems within the larger system. This sub-set hypothesis can explain parallel as well as non-parallel recovery from bilingual aphasia.

To some degree, the polyglot is choosing to perform an adaptation of behaviour, in deciding to use one language rather than another. It has become almost a matter of simple register, and the

> process of selecting one word and inhibiting the others when two languages are involved seems to be fairly similar to the process of

[18] For an overview see Springer and Deutsch 1989

[19] For more recent contributions to the debate see Paradis, 1981; Kirsner et al, 1984; Appel and Muysken 1987, while for a useful bibliography on vocabulary in a second language see Meara, 1983.

> choosing the most relevant word from a range of stylistic options. (Aitchison, 1987, 205-6)

While this may be true at the highest levels of bilingual expertise, it is not necessarily the case throughout the more advanced stages of language-learning that precede bilingual status.

Each of us uses our native language for a number of ends, not the least important of which at a personal level are self-expression and self-concealment. The use of a second language makes us vulnerable by encouraging revelatory self-expression, without giving us the guaranteed option, available in our mother tongue, of self-concealment.[20] Even allowing that we wish not to disguise anything at all, there is a second problem concerning the potential discrepancy between the meaning that was intended and the meaning that was conveyed. As Neruda put it, "entre los labios y la voz, algo se va muriendo..." [21]

This inevitable falsification, however, should not be seen as essentially negative. The poles of destructive lie and innocent error are a long way apart. Besides, the concept of truth as being in some accessible way integral is an ideal that the court of law may endeavour to uphold, but which is not a feature of daily language use. Indeed, the reverse is true, in that the images we try to convey are never free of motivation, and all our descriptions are, in both senses of the word, partial. As Steiner has it,

> We speak less than the truth, we fragment in order to reconstruct desired alternatives, we select and elide. (Steiner 1975, 220)

This is yet another significant way in which the use of language among adults differs from the way in which children in the early stages of development use their own communicative acts.

---

[20] Talleyrand's *"La parole a été donnée à l'homme pour déguiser sa pensée" (Speech was given to man in order to disguise his thought)* is a pointed reference to the evolutionary advantages inherent in the ability to mask and misdirect.

[21] "between the lips and the voice, something begins to die ..." From "Veinte Poemas de Amor y una Canción Desesperada".

Q> Do you find yourself settling then for something simpler than what you would really like to say?

A> Oh I think so, I think you take the easy option. You can't say what you don't know... if you can't say it one way, find another route...

Q> And do you find another route to the same thing, or do you find an easier route to saying perhaps 80% of what you would like to say?

A> I think so, I think that is what happens. (7)

It has been suggested in earlier chapters that our fear of error is reinforced both by our educational system and by our view of our adult selves as competent - or, at least, unchallenged - users of our native language. There is an even more fundamental level on which our spoken errors can be unsettling, for the voice serves to draw attention to our selves. From its very earliest use, the individual voice was not just incidental but vital in drawing parental attention to our selves, and in keeping us alive. As adults, our voice invites others to listen to us, to respond, to consider what we are saying. Any given linguistic act, then, is an attempt to get the self represented, but is surrounded in speaker and listener by a penumbra of simultaneous complex, dense mental events. These are so rich that they are frequently not translatable into language, but they nonetheless affect the quality and nature of the communication.

Precisely what those mental events are, and the extent and ways in which they affect us, vary greatly from person to person within the group. Most adults expressed familiarity with both extremes of feeling when facing this experience for the first time. When interviewees were asked what it felt like to start a language from scratch, replies included:

> Excited at the thought of finding out how another race of people communicated with each other. Really exciting. Daunting, and challenging, but not enough to put me off. (5)

and, at the other end of the spectrum:

> Apprehensive, disheartened. No confidence. A bit nervous... In time I developed a sense of the language and how I could speak it... you've got to go in head first. (22)

In language, as in the case with any activity which has a component of instinct, such as migration, nest-building, hiding from predators, and so forth, it is wrong for us to assume that these instinctive reactions are immediately, unfailingly, and universally successful. The instinctive prompt is there, and the development of the skill required to allow the instinctive behaviour to be performed requires practice. Far from being unlearnable, learning is a powerful factor in language acquisition in children. (Bates and Elman, 1996), and remains so in the case of adults who are coming to grips with a second or subsequent language.

One receptive aspect of the communication skills that adults have already acquired in their own language and find bewilderingly absent when it comes to a new one, is the recognition of word boundaries in spoken language. In our own language we hear speech as, on the one hand, an uninterrupted flow of sound, and yet we interpret that flow as being infinitely subdivisible into discrete and inter-relating words. The reality of it, as Pinker reminds us, is that in

> the speech sound wave, one word runs into the next seamlessly; there are no little silences between spoken words the way there are white spaces between written words. We simply hallucinate word boundaries when we reach the edge of a stretch of sound that matches some entry in our mental dictionary. This becomes apparent when we listen to speech in a foreign language: it is impossible to tell where one word ends and the next begins. (Pinker, 1994, 159-60).

In point of fact, there are some indications of where the separations can be visualised between the syllables in the case of spoken language (Liberman et al, 1974), but no

such indications when it comes to the divisions between phonemes (Miles and Miles 1990). One of the skills that an adult second-language learner requires, then, is that of learning to experience the illusion of words, syllables and phonemes as severally present in a string of sound. It is our inability to do this that leads us to lament that the French, or the Spaniards, or whoever it is, speak so fast.[22]

The background against which adult second-language learners come to a new language has among its features the fact that any of the target language to which the learner as listener is exposed is likely to seem faster and therefore less easy to manipulate and interpret than the more familiar mother tongue utterances, and despite the fact of mother-tongue interference the learner is required to produce sounds which are frequently new in themselves, and combinations of sounds which are, in terms of native language speech, quite meaningless until meaning has been attributed to them and that attribution learned.

> When you start a new language, you feel anxious, bemused. It's difficult, isn't it? You actually don't understand any words at all, you have to start remembering a few words and building up those few words... and there's an element of pleasure in it. (11)

Early success is important, as is anything which will reassure and take away some of the tension. Some people react positively to the demands of the situation, while for others it is too much:

> It is exciting, challenging, in a personal sort of way... though not with any sort of trepidation. When you are just starting something, an apparent early success, even if it is only illusory, is helpful. There is quite a high proportion of drop-out, very early on. If the first experience is that it is hard work and grind, it can put some

[22] Other factors that lead to this impression are the unfamiliar predominance of vowel sounds, and the relative shortness of many words when compared to English. Indicative of the discomfort that this causes to those who are outside the linguistic group, is the value-laden vocabulary that is commonly used to refer to it - foreigners are spoken of as "gabbling", or "chattering", or "chuntering on" or "rabbitting away" in their own tongue.

people off... perhaps through lack of confidence, or they thought they were going to learn to speak in three weeks... (2)

Uncertainty as to what can be reasonably be expected in the way of achievement inevitably leads to keen disappointment and frustration:

How long is it going to take to master this bloody language? (39).

This is a key question, asked in this instance in the fifth and final class attended, but unrealistic expectations are not the province only of those who have no prior experience of language learning. Previous success in another language - and this success does not have to be absolute, but merely relative when it comes to this new language - can also cause frustration:

You feel apprehensive, because you feel as if you should be at this level straight away, having done other languages. (4)

Even if all seems to be going well in the initial stages, with the broadening of the parameters of the knowledge that students are expected to retain comes a rueful reassessment of the situation:

To begin with you feel enthusiastic, and hopeful that things will start to click, and one will soon become confident.
Q> *Do these feelings change with time?*
A> Oh yes. One become less enthusiastic as one realises that things do not click, and in fact it is all about hard work and discipline. (13)

There is also a curious level at which the learners, although quite used to the fact that normal human communication is marked by hesitation, changes in syntax and register, mere approximations of meaning, and moments of incoherence when it all falls apart, still expect to be able to achieve perfectly grammatical patterns in a language with which they are far less familiar. While this is undoubtedly achievable in the long term, excessive insistence on it in the early stages can lead to disappointment and a

feeling of inadequacy. With experience, however, it becomes easier to take a pragmatic view:

> I would prefer to be fluent, but I tend to try to be accurate. I get the worst of both things! I would prefer to just say things, and make mistakes, rather than thinking too long about them...and still make mistakes! (6)

A further consideration is the extent to which the world of the second-language classroom is an exclusively or predominantly oral world, and the effect that this level of orality may have upon the members of the learning group. At the root of this lies a conflict between two versions of personal identity - there is still a hangover among older students of the times when the class system was all-pervading, and personal identity was construed primarily in and through one's place in the social order. Until the move towards comprehensive education , all education in this country, whether in the state or private sectors, was of this type. Children of school age either went to a public school, or to a state school. If people were educated by the state, then at the age of eleven or twelve - an important age from the point of view of lateralization of the brain, with its consequent implications for future language-learning facility - they either went to a grammar school and studied languages among other things, or to a secondary modern school where, for the most part, they did not. As school activities took up roughly half of the waking day, the type of schooling was vastly important in dictating what was done there, how well people studied their own language, and the amount and nature of contact with other languages and cultures. Even those adult students who are currently in their forties and fifties are frequently the product of this dichotomy in the system. Notions of self in relation to language were constructed therefore from the outside inwards. A further consideration is the fact that oral command of a language was valued far less in the old O-level and A-level syllabuses than now, and a disproportionate emphasis was given to written manipulation of text in the form of unseen and prose translations, dictation and so on. And this was the situation of those who were held to be good at languages.

There is also an important contrast, if not necessarily a clash, between an oral and a literate organisation of the world, and of our identification of our selves within that world. Effective oral language use is associated with improvisation, intuition, repetition, simultaneity and interaction. All of these things happen at speed, and in public. Since they happen at speed, they require much practice and confidence if they are to work. Since they happen in public, they are immediately subject to critical evaluation by the interlocutor. On the other hand, the linear nature of the printed page fits in well with the private expression of sequence and continuity, composition, narrative, classification, cause and effect. While it is true that for many adult learners in Further Education home and social culture are predominantly oral, it is by no means true of all. Many professional people who are second-language learners are highly socialised into the literate side of the culture, and may trust that side more than the perceived high risk of public oral communication.

Whatever the private circumstances of the individual, it is instructive to examine oral language use as defined above, in the context of an adult learner of a second language. In order for improvisation to occur, there must be a grasp of the theme around which the improvisation is to be structured, and also of the means necessary to permit its elaboration. Intuition happens not in a vacuum, but as the result of a sensitive response to a stimulus, and this degree of linguistic sensitivity is by definition either absent in the early learner or, if present, it is a response to some feature of mother-tongue similarity to the target language. Repetition, though a feature of unscripted oral use in mother-tongue, is not seen as correct target-language usage, which aims rather to produce a seamless and coherent flow.

Simultaneity will occur in language use once all self-consciousness has disappeared, and once the improvisational skills have been developed - once again, this is asking a great deal of a beginner. As for effective interaction, this is most likely to occur once improvisation, intuition and simultaneity are all in place, and not before. This is not to suggest that some degree of meaningful interaction can not take place from the very earliest contact with the target language. In point of fact it is essential that it should, however limited the scope of the interlanguage at the student's disposal, if the student is to move from self-conscious to unselfconscious language use. Small wonder, then,

that the emphasis on the spoken language from the early stages of a beginners' course should place such extreme demands on the learners.

Adult second-language learners who are struggling with the complexities of their chosen target language express their oral difficulties in terms of problems of structuring sequence, of linking words and ideas into a continuous whole, of composing a narrative, even on the smallest scale, which will classify, link or explain. In other words, the task of oral expression is referred to in the terminology of the written organisation of the world. Yet most students express a wish to speak a given language, rather than to write it.

> You feel excited, curiosity. De-skilled, but more in conversation. Frustration - you have to go back and dilute and filter the English until you have the Spanish for it, and that's frustrating. In a written translation the parameters are clear, and the only thing stopping me is a few words, and I can look them up...but when you're talking you don't know what you're going to say. You haven't got in front of you a kind of map that says this is your journey, and that's what you've got to try and achieve. When it comes to conversation, I don't know what the next question is going to be. In a foreign language this is frustrating because it holds you back. (1)

This struggle for relative dominance between the eye and the tongue takes us again to the spectrum of accuracy versus fluency in the second language. It is asking a lot for students who favour the eye to launch themselves into the oral world, armed with a few scraps of language, just as it is equally demanding of those whose culture is principally an oral one - or whose aspirations involve simply learning to speak the language - to manipulate and create written text.

Fundamental to our appreciation of the process of language learning in the classroom is our awareness of it as a group process which is circumscribed by the constraints that typify involvement in any group activity. Our belief in the presence of like-minded

people in the group can have a very positive effect, and some students take friends with them in an attempt to guarantee a source of support and encouragement:

> I was nervous, anxious that I wouldn't be able to cope, feeling very unsure, but hoping that the Latin that I'd done would help me in some way.
> *Q> You use three strong words there: nervous, anxious and unsure.*
> *A>* Well, I was.
> *Q> It must have seemed quite daunting in the first sessions?*
> *A>* It was easier because I had Val with me (a friend), and I got a bit anxious when she decided to leave, because I'm not very good with people I don't know, and I was a bit anxious about the people I would meet.... just generally nervous of coming into a strange place.
> *Q> Do these feelings change with time?*
> *A>* Oh yes, when I got to know the people I was quite happy. When I know the room that I'm in and the people that I'm meeting, I'm all right. It's just the initial introduction to a strange place and a strange group of people... and I like someone with me that I know... and sort of see me through. If I go on next year, I'm a bit worried about will I meet any of the same people, or will they be all strangers? (9)

Other fears abound - typically the idea that other students will have done the subject before and will thereby have an advantage. It is often the case in Further Education that a number of false beginners are present, especially in the case of languages commonly taught in schools, and this is a further problem when it comes to the integration of the group as a whole. However, previous attempts to learn the target language are unlikely to have been successful if the student is still studying at beginner's level, and the lapse of time between having last studied a language at school and having taken it up again at New College can be considerable, reaching a recorded maximum in this study of forty-nine years.

Whether or not there are false beginners among those present, it is not uncommon for beginners to feel at a disadvantage when compared to other members of the group.

Typical reactions include these reminders of the fact that learning is an individual achievement that takes place in a collective forum:

> Initially it was quite...it was really difficult, because there were about ten of us, from different parts of the country... from the world, actually... so they had a lot more experience than I did.....I felt as if I was a little bit behind the rest of the class. (8)

> My feelings haven't changed, as I still feel quite vulnerable. (After 7 weeks.) Everyone seems to be a bit more confident, and be able to answer the questions from memory, whereas I'm still having to refer to the book a lot. (21)

For many beginners this disparity of perceived achievement is a spur, although for others it is an obstacle from the beginning, whether the advantage held by other students is real or merely imagined:

> I think there are people in the class who are good at foreign languages, and have a natural aptitude to them, especially those who have studied before, possibly in another language. I think they have more confidence. You've got to get the basic understanding that someone like myself who's starting totally from scratch..... (shakes head, and shrugs) (21)

An additional complicating factor has to do with what Attridge (1988) calls "language's potential for semantic expansion," which in one's mother tongue can be a source for pun, joke, ambiguity and attendant pleasures, but which can become threatening and confusing in a second language, as if the nature - rather than merely the form - of language itself had suddenly changed. There is also the other side of the same coin - what I suppose we must term semantic contraction, in which the foreign-language term, deprived of those additional connotations, means less to the learner than its mother-tongue counterpart. A new language - not unlike a pun in one's own language - appears disquieting, as boundaries between sounds, between sound and

letter, between meanings become blurred in a collage of elusive and indefinable components.

So we find ourselves facing the

> apparent paradox that the hardest task of which human beings are capable is the one thing which they learn at 18 months. (Miller, 1983, 92).

Children can learn aspects of the meaning of a new word on the basis only of a few incidental exposures and can retain this knowledge for a long period - a process known as "fast mapping". It is often maintained that fast mapping is the result of a dedicated language learning mechanism, but it is possible that the same capacity might apply in domains other than language learning. (Markson and Bloom, 1997). This is in stark and depressing contrast with the difficulty of learning languages subsequently as an adult, whether this takes place in the classroom or while immersed in a relevant culture.

As the child develops increasing linguistic skills it becomes

> ...obvious why the acquisition of true speech leads to an enormous increase in conceptual power. The addition of a special symbolic memory connected to pre-existing conceptual centres results in the ability to elaborate, refine, create, connect and remember great numbers of new concepts. It is not the case that the language centres "contain" concepts or that concepts "arise" from speech. Meaning arises from the interaction of value-category memory with the combined activity of conceptual areas and speech areas. (Edelman, 1992, 130)

In the case of a normal adult, all this hard work has already been done, and the ability to conceptualise achieved. The trick now is to transfer the ability to express conceptualisation from the mother tongue to the second language.

Within the learning classroom, there are support mechanisms which reduce the effects of the problems attendant on this transfer, but early exposure to the authentic social context of the target language can have a marked effect:

> If your command of the language is poor, you have to settle for a black and white existence, you can't add the nuances of meaning... I felt I had lost all my personality because the language was lacking, I was completely unable to say exactly what I wanted, and had to settle for one option or the other, whereas I am a very ambivalent person... I was stripped of all this, and became labelled as "liking" some things, because I had said so, and "disliking" something else, just because I was no longer hungry. (19)

In the early stages, productive use of the target language is not unlike trying to swim and make notes at the same time on what you are doing and how you are doing it. When one is used to the props and the timescale relevant to writing in the mother tongue, the increased speed of the oral world, especially as it relates to the new target language, can be threatening. Again, when one is particularly accustomed to the oral use of language without the necessary constant support of writing, then the need to produce accurate written work in the target language is no less of a challenge.

Whatever patterns may characterise our normal daily language usage, it remains true that productive use of the target language presents very real difficulties. At the level of a motor skill, there is a wealth of facial and bodily adjustments involved in the correct production of what have until recently been foreign sounds, and until the muscles involved have learned the adjustments necessary for spontaneous correct pronunciation, then there is the need for active concentration on sound production. However, oral expression remains daunting and difficult for other reasons as well, not least because of the intense time constraints operating on oral interaction. There simply is not time to think. The problem then begins to emerge - and it will remain a dilemma throughout the intermediate stages of language learning as well - as to whether the student's main requirement is that of fluency at the possible expense of

accuracy, or vice versa. The tension between these two conflicting goals can create a high level of anxiety:

> Yes, I do feel anxious about this. If you take accuracy as more important, then you never become fluent. Having said that, I'm sure that at heart I would want to be more accurate than fluent. That's because I don't want to appear as if I've made a mistake...I admire people who are fluent. I think when I speak German, I like to speak it at speed...that may be a kind of linguistic arrogance, that if I speak it slowly I'm not speaking German as a German would...but it does annoy me when I say something and I know I've said it wrong. Rather than let it go, I'll go back and correct myself and then, rather than communication, it becomes an academic exercise... (1)

Ultimately, the importance given to either accuracy or fluency as a goal depends upon the reasons for studying the language in the first place:

> In Spain I would want to communicate. I would come across as more fluent in Spain than I would in England, where I would try to get (the spoken Spanish) perfect... I think there is no way when you are talking to a Spaniard that you can worry too much about subjunctives etc... they are not going to worry ... most people don't stop you at all if you use the wrong tense or something like that.
> *Q> Are you at all anxious about either of them?*
> *A>* Not anxious, but cross with myself for making mistakes if I should have got it right, things I really knew. (10)

> There are situations where accuracy is important, e.g. medical problems abroad, but in terms of general conversation you make yourself understood but don't participate in any interesting conversation in any way if you stick to being basic and accurate. Ideally you could be both, but there are many situations where the accuracy is the more important. (2)

> I think accuracy is most important, at least at this stage; fluency will come later on. I'm anxious about both, but not to a great extent. (14)

We make progress if we can learn to depend less and less on whatever set of props we normally rely on, and eventually abandon them completely. This is as true in oral as it is in written language, in both of which the learner is slowed down by the need to marshal words in what is believed to be the correct order. This process of gradual liberation from the constraints on which we normally rely takes courage, as well as hard work. The modalities of literacy are essential and deeply helpful, but they can trip you up if you try to learn to speak faster than you can write. The accuracy of written language needs to be such (if it is to be approved of) that it slows down in the early stages of second-language learning so far as to be hardly fluent at all. This is not only a function of the written medium, but is also one result of the quest for accuracy. The ideal is to aim for a combination of accuracy and fluency which will function without the need for any conscious confirmatory system. This is not merely a case of muscle memory - normal language use is like jazz in that the established themes should not disappear irretrievably among all the improvisation.

Again, as is the case when studying music, there is no substitute for practice, commitment and hard work:

> So, during rest periods I used to study a little bit more to try to catch up with the rest of the class. I used to have this metal coil (sic = spiral notebook) and I would write words on the paper and just flick through the words during the day.
> *Q> So you've taken a very deliberate approach to your language learning, haven't you?*
> *A>* I always used to have a dictionary in my pocket, so as soon as someone said something I didn't understand I'd write the word down, and at the end of the day I'd go through the words which I didn't know so I could memorise those particular words. I was really

> giving it 100%. .... we had a complete day when I could only communicate in Spanish - I wasn't allowed to speak in English...
> *Q> How did you feel about that?*
> *A>* Initially it was really difficult, but really helpful because I had to communicate in Spanish, so I made every effort possible. It was fun - I enjoyed it. You need to have a lot of patience, and you need not be frightened to go and if you make a fool of yourself... It's more being frightened that you're going to make a fool of yourself... (8)

Underlying this committed approach is the inevitable question of motivation:

> I enrolled on the language course so I could feel I was doing something useful, and to give me a bit of self-respect, as well as when I go on holiday, being able to understand what people say to me. I really enjoy learning new things. (21)

> I have a house in Spain and consider it essential to handle any problems which may occur. Also to be able to speak to neighbours who seem to desire to speak to us even though we cannot understand them at present. (13)

And so the process goes on, relatively easy for the fortunate few, and something of a struggle for many. As it continues, the first major variations begin in the make-up of the group. In these early stages there is a relatively high drop-out rate as an in-group begins to form, self-selecting typically through its sense of acceptance of the challenges inherent in the learning task. At the same time, prompted by feelings of unease, a number of individuals prepare to leaving the learning group. They do so without forming an out-group of any apparent cohesion, and it is the survivors who cohere, partly through an increased sense of group spirit and commitment which serves to strengthen the notion of group identity and of having survived, collectively, the first major challenge of the language-learning process.

There are moments, even at the beginners' level, when students feel that they are making no further progress, or even that they are forgetting what little they know, and they are not always easily convinced that plateaux - even backsliding - are evidence of valuable internal reorganisation, and a sign of significant progress. The correct initial use as taught is received and learned as an unanalysed formula. Later incorrect attempts to reformulate a pattern based upon this learning are evidence of the internal struggle to set up a rule or a series of rules by which to produce correct utterances, rules will not necessarily be perfected for some time.[23]

At the heart of the listening difficulties lie the twin problems of word recognition which always form an integral part of our daily language use, although in native speech they have long ceased to be problematic. The first task is that of separating out the uninterrupted stream of speech into words, and the second is that of identifying the words as they roar past. As in speech production, listeners to a familiar language consider many more words than they eventually select. A huge number are activated, and those that are not required are gradually suppressed. The same type of spreading activation model found in word production is also found in word recognition - even though many of the details are still obscure. As for speaking, the main challenge remains that of how to locate, order and pronounce the new words in ways that will make sense. To what extent these problems remain the same, and how far they transform themselves into other or additional concerns in the case of the intermediate adult learner, is the subject of the following chapter.

[23] For an interesting study of a Japanese child learning English, see Hakuta 1976.

CHAPTER 8

THE INTERMEDIATE STUDENT

Ahora sufro lo pobre, lo mezquino, lo triste,
lo desgraciado y muerto que tiene una garganta,
cuando desde el abismo de su idioma quisiera
gritar lo que no puede por imposible, y calla:
las palabras entonces no sirven,
son palabras.

Nocturno, Rafael Alberti.[24]

This chapter will offer an analysis of the development of competent performance, as evidenced by a gradual development of autonomy in the learning process as well as in language use, as the expertise develops. For many adult students, the challenges and achievements offered by a beginners' course in a modern foreign language are sufficient, and, indeed, sometimes more than sufficient. There are, however, a number of students who progress each year beyond the beginners' level, and try to develop their expertise further. Whereas the beginners' groups tend to be large in number to begin with, although the levels of withdrawal are relatively high at certain key stages in the academic year, the group of intermediate students tends to be a more stable entity; the level of withdrawal is characteristically lower than for a beginners' group, and, indeed, variations in the composition of the group are frequently the result of new members joining, rather than established members dropping out.

The intermediate group is also marked by a number of specific features which distinguish it from the beginners' group. The members share a common goal which is more clearly defined, in that they know what they mean when they say they "want to

[24] Now I suffer the poverty, the meanness, the sorrow
the wretchedness, the lifelessness that a throat contains
when it wishes to cry out from the depths of its language
what it cannot, what is impossible, and it falls silent:
words are of no use then,
they are words.

learn" the language of their choice. The early naïveté which allowed some beginners to think they might learn the language fast, or with only a modicum of commitment, has gone, and there is a purposefulness about the intermediate group which allows it to form a collective identity within a short space of time. At an individual level, there is a growing awareness of what each student finds more or less difficult in the language, and a more realistic appraisal of the strengths and weaknesses of others in the group. Interference from the mother tongue is still a constant feature which needs to be guarded against, but there are moments when patterns in the target language now emerge spontaneously, and are felt to be hugely rewarding. There is also a greater level of reflection on the process and mechanics of language learning and use.

Q> *Is there a hierarchy of difficulty in the different skills?*

A> The reading and writing I can do at my own speed, but the oral has to be instantaneous, so it (the problem) has to be a lack of familiarity - it may be that the listening comprehension is the greatest difficulty. It's more difficult on the tape.

Q> *Is there any sense in which you have decided that in advance - when you hear me, or another live speaker, it will be easier to understand than when a tape recorder appears?*

A> Yes, I think Oh God, not another one of those horrible little tapes that I won't be able to do. The tape is the unknown quantity - you don't know what's coming out of it, particularly in an exam, so there is immediately this tension, a tightening up of the brain, except for the people who are very, very fluent. And very exposed to hearing Spanish.

Q> *How does that tension manifest itself?*

A> I just think Oh God, I'll not be able to do it.

Q> *And you're clenching your fists while you say that...*

A> Yes, because you feel I'll not be able to do this, I'll not understand it, and I want to be able to do it... and the frustration makes you tense.

Q> *So, are some of these skills intrinsically more difficult, or are made to seem more difficult because of the way in which languages*

> *are taught and learned - is it in fact a harder thing to speak Spanish than to write it, and harder to listen with understanding than to read?*
>
> A> For me it is much easier to read and write Spanish than it is to speak or to listen with understanding. I think that as an adult, you've acquired too many other skills, too much other knowledge, so you are not listening as a child listens and takes in as much... Perhaps adults are more inhibited, in the way they listen, or are selective when they listen...(7)

Or perhaps, as suggested in Chapter 7, it is to some degree the result of our partial dependence upon a written culture rather than an oral one which gives some of us greater levels of confidence in our manipulation of written material in the target language. It remains true, of course, that written material is held still on the page, and we can deal with it without the immediate sense of urgency that accompanies oral and listening language use. There is a widespread feeling that the receptive and productive uses of written language are in some ways easier to manage than the oral and listening activities.

Oral language work is still, for most people,

> ...the skill I would really like to brush up on. I think it's the most difficult skill to acquire, and it's the one I'd feel most pleased about to get it right. I can overcome the written side, but the oral side takes more time...to acquire it. (5)

As tutors, we should have few illusions about the magnitude of the task facing our students, or about the level of commitment needed to achieve it. The use of metaphors of internal conflict - *"this tension", "a tightening of the brain", "I can overcome the written side"*, together with physical manifestations of tension, such as clenched fists and sweeping hand gestures, were commonplace during the interviews with intermediate students.

> Listening is difficult, and speaking. I like writing best, probably because I'm best at it. I don't know if there is such a thing as having an ear for a language - if there is such a thing, I don't think I've got that. (2)

There is still, predictably enough, frustration at the need to oversimplify what one is saying, and in the process to dilute the force of one's contribution to the conversation. This was noted in Chapter 4, and continues to be a feature of the relatively advanced learner. Indeed, as the learner acquires greater communicative skills, s/he comes to have increased expectations of what it is possible to say:

> If you are talking to someone you want to come across as being a fairly intelligent human being, you know... if words fail you, and you can't quite say what you'd really like to say then there's always the danger that you come across as being very... er... superficial. (30)

Increased skills lead to greater ambitions, which in turn place greater demands on the skills themselves. It is this feeling of never making quite enough progress that calls for very real courage if the student is to stay the course. The importance of positive feedback, stressing the achievements already made, can be exaggerated in the case of people who are at least as conscious of the size of the challenge as they are of the satisfaction:

> when the language is poorly known, the feeling is probably more of a ...a certain exhilaration, at...as it were, attempting to conquer new ground, to express ideas that you have never expressed before in that way, so there is a certain challenge and excitement, also inevitably, I think as well, an anxiety that one won't understand the reply, or that one will not have communicated quite the idea that one thought one was communicating, so that there is that element of anxiety as well as of challenge. (20)

Everything that the intermediate student attempts to do in the target language can serve as a reminder of the distances still to be covered. Especially galling for many is the fact that oral production requires such an effort:

> Q> *What makes speaking such hard work?*
> A> What makes it hard work is the fact that it slows you down. This is not for total lack of vocabulary - it's the problem of converting the vocabulary that you know to the spoken word quickly, choosing the appropriate word quickly, choosing the right tense of the verb and that sort of thing. In order to try not to delay things too long you tend to try and use basic vocabulary which you know more readily, and only afterwards think of words that you might have known and might have used...so the spoken language tends to be much more basic. (2)
>
> What makes it hard work is that it slows you down to try and find the right vocabulary, and I get anxious about it. There's a lack of confidence when it comes to speaking, yet when I go home I can think of the sentence perfectly clearly... a level of anxiety that I'm not prepared to make and say more mistakes than I do... I seem to take longer to go through something or read... I tend to dash at it and make mistakes, and need to take more time over it than other people who seem to do it more quickly than I do... It slows me down a lot, because I tend to think in English, put it into Spanish and then say what I have to say...
> Q> *Oh, right, so you rehearse it twice?*
> A> Yes, that's right, and then out it comes. And I'm only just beginning to when I'm listening, to hear the Spanish and not translate it into English... I've just suddenly become aware that I'm not doing that any longer, but if I'm going to speak I do do it. So if I'm listening to someone, if I'm listening to the radio, which is very quick, I don't try and translate everything, I try and let the words just go in as they are... I don't understand everything... but the tape is

pretty good because you can go back to it again and again... It's when it's very very quick that I just can't cope with it...(6)

This realisation that translation back into the mother tongue is not an essential feature of language use marks an important stage in development, and it is interesting to see it reported, as here, as happening in different skills at different times. However, knowing it is one thing - being able to progress into that more advanced stage when English is not constantly a conscious point of reference is much more difficult. Chapter 3 has addressed the fact that our being aware of the need to stop "thinking in English" means that this very awareness can serve as an inhibitor when it comes to speaking in the target language.

The emergence of belief in a hierarchy of difficulty when it comes to aspects of language use finds an echo in the extent to which the target language structure does or does not conform to mother-tongue usage. There is a curious unease at the apparent illogicality of some metaphorical or grammatical pattern which seemingly flies in the face of mother-tongue-based 'reason', and it is an unease which goes beyond the reaction to a change of idiom - having a cat in one's throat, instead of a frog in - of all languages, French - has a certain charm. Structural issues are more deeply unsettling, as though the nature of linguistic communication itself had changed. Also, as individuals, we have our own ways of dealing with the problems posed by language use. Without siding wholly with Humpty Dumpty, words can often not be assigned a firm meaning. We therefore have to come to terms with what Lakoff (1972) terms the vague boundaries and fuzzy edges of natural language concepts:

Q> *Do you see Spanish as being in some way an extension of English.... another way of saying identical things?*
A> No, it's not another way of expressing English, but at the same time of course you either hear an expression or you read it and you think now what does that mean, but you're thinking in English, you have to, because you haven't got that vast background knowledge that would let you equate it to something else in Spanish, so all the time I'm doing a translation when I'm reading...

Q> *And when you're listening?*

A> Yes.

Q> *You must translate very fast.*

A> Yes... but it's not translating word for word... it's translating meaning, I suppose. If you ask me a question in Spanish, I have to think of the answer in English before I can give the Spanish.

Q> *You rehearse the answer first in English.....or you let it form...?*

A> I let it form, not rehearsing word for word, but the idea is formed in English before it comes out in Spanish. And I have to see the words, now the same thing used to happen when I worked - I was a shorthand typist - and any new word, I had to see that in my mind before I could begin to write it in shorthand. I had to visualise the word first... there's no way I could write a word unless I could visualise it.

Q> *Is that because Pitman depends on breaking things down into syllables?*

A> In a way, yes, but it also depends on whether the word begins above, on or below the line, so what you write initially has to be correct, otherwise you alter the meaning when you read it back.

Q> *Is there any similarity between these two processes?*

A> Yes, because I have to know what it means, what the word is going to look like, and I have to do it in English because I haven't any other medium to express myself.

Q> *Fine. Now, how do you do it when you're coming back - you've heard something in Spanish... do you visualise that word before it gets translated into English?*

A> I think English is still the intermediate step whichever way I go. It makes it hard work, but it's the only way (7)

The opportunities here for mother-tongue interference are almost limitless. As noted in Chapter 4, others adopt a different strategy, involving considerable forward planning and beginning to relinquish conscious use of mother-tongue in favour of mentalese:

> I don't think in English, but I think at the beginning of a sentence how I'm going to end it... the sentence will automatically follow on, grammatically, I hope, and people are able to understand. I'm not sure, if I plunge into a Spanish sentence without thinking, that I'm going to get myself out at the other end. So I tend to think of the whole thing as a finished sentence, which you never do in English. It's only very well-known phrases that I suddenly think, oh, I said that in Spanish without even thinking about it in English...(10)

Tied in with the somewhat self-conscious use of the target language that characterises adult students at this level, is the highly significant question of error. Error is significant to the teacher, as it reveals areas where things have not been fully understood, or where for whatever reason there is further work to be done. Error is significant to the student in other ways, and this again is a feature in which the intermediate class differs from the groups of beginners. With the beginners, everyone expects mistakes to be made. In an intermediate class, there is sometimes the feeling among students that error is somehow more reprehensible at this level, and consequently the fear of making mistakes can be more inhibiting:

> I mind repeating the same mistakes, because in spoken language sometimes as you're saying the word you know it's wrong but there's nothing you can do about it then. Sometimes I find the inability to understand the spoken language is frustrating, irritating, because I know far more Spanish than is evident from what I can hear. If it was all written down I could probably manage, but I find even at ordinary reading speed I can sometimes get the gist of stories, but there were one or two I hadn't a clue what they were about. Even reading at home, there is an enormous amount of vocabulary I didn't know. Also the word order is not the same, so you're trying to unravel that and while you're trying to do that the reading is going on... (2)

The point about vocabulary is an extremely important one - while most beginners' courses present the world as expressible in the target language in a number of functional packages, each of which has clear boundaries beyond which there is no apparent need to stray, progression to an intermediate level destroys the boundary markers, and with them the safety engendered by the functional package structure. Suddenly, the whole world has been renamed. In terms of the British educational system, studying a language at GCSE level and studying the same language at A level, are two entirely different things. Progress, which to the beginner was measurable from the earliest days of the course, becomes at this level more difficult to gauge, less constant, and less subject to student will:

> To me there are times when I feel like I'm learning a lot and other times when I'm sort of on a plateau, hanging around... it depends whether you're in the country or whether you're in a classroom... in the classroom I find every now and again that you don't seem to be learning enough vocabulary, you read the paper or listen to a news article and you think, Blimey! There's a lot of words there I don't understand. With Spanish I found I understood the grammar quite quickly, and I can read a newspaper and not have problems with the grammar.... (4)

Time and again, it is a feeling of anxiety tied in with the risk of being seen to make mistakes, that is an inhibiting factor with adult students at all levels of proficiency. After all, we are used to behaving in society as though being an adult somehow implies being in possession of the facts, the skills, the knowledge that will allow us to get things right. At the microcosmic societal level of the family, the parental role again encourages us to see ourselves, and to be seen by others (not only our children, but also our friends, colleagues, doctors, social workers, bank managers and so forth - the list is endless) as competent individuals, sufficiently mature and knowledgeable to get things right. However, in this particular role as adult language-learner, the odds are stacked *against our getting* things right all the time, and indeed, that sought-after consistency of "rightness" is not even a feature of our normal mother-tongue usage, as any accurate transcription makes clear. We also bring with us a history of school

learning which presented error, at the very least, as something undesirable. Unfortunately, it is precisely at this intermediate level, when the students are attempting to use language at the limits of their knowledge, that mistakes continue to be an inevitable accompaniment to any challenging work. Not for the first time, it is the public nature of these mistakes that students find daunting:

> The oral side really bothers me, I mean I hate it, and I really am anxious about it, and whenever I have an oral it just goes to pot and it's a hundred times worse than it would normally be, just because I am so worried about it. But with the written work I feel that I've got time to be able to sit down and look at it and generally speaking there's a reasonable amount of accuracy there...I feel quite...part of it's confidence as well. If I thought I was speaking properly I would speak a lot better as well!
> Q> *So your awareness that it might happen leads to it happening?*
> A> It does happen, I know it happens! I'd love to be fluent, and if you were in the country as long as you could express what you were saying it wouldn't matter whether you were accurate or not, but with a translation you have time to think and you can get that accuracy that you can't have when you're speaking otherwise the communication breaks down. I try to give equal importance to both, but accuracy is easier to achieve in written work." (3)

The fact that mistakes are an inevitable accompaniment to growth in language use remains an uncomfortable aspect of the learning process for many adult students. What had earlier seemed acceptable when the student was a member of a beginners' group has by now become problematical:

> ....the apprehension is there with the oral work. When people ask me questions I quite often wonder whether I'm actually understanding. When the work is in front of you it's sort of solid and you can see it, and you know exactly what it means, or you can work out what it means, but when somebody just suddenly throws a

question at you or is talking to you I sometimes wonder if I've got it right or not. You're apprehensive about replying in case you give a daft answer. The whole oral exchange is painful. From the TV and things like that, that doesn't bother me, because it has no personal element involved. (3)

The processing of language, from taking in the raw speech to retaining an awareness of the meaning encoded within that speech, is a complex one. A simple outline of the construction process would suggest that listeners take in the raw speech and retain a phonological representation of it in 'working memory', then attempt to organise the phonological representation into constituents, identifying their content and function. As they identify each constituent, they use it to construct underlying propositions, building continually on to a hierarchical representation of propositions, and, finally, once they have identified the propositions for a constituent, they retain them in working memory and at some point purge memory of the phonological representation. In doing this, they forget the exact wording and retain the meaning. (Clark and Clark, 1977)[25] . It may be open to doubt whether these are the steps by which raw language is converted into a trace of meaning, and, if so, whether they are necessarily applied in this order, but the fact remains that the processing of language, already sufficiently complex in the mother tongue because of the unpredictable nature of language use, ceases to be an unconscious event to the intermediate student of a second or subsequent language. If, as appears to be the case, the processing involves the conscious application of what is known about the target language to the text that is being heard or read, then we can expect the processing to be a far slower and far more demanding activity than is the case with the mother tongue.

Speed of processing is important, and is one of the characteristics of natural language use. Achieving it implies the acquisition of a processing system that is flexible enough to perform successfully, irrespective of input. This is necessarily lacking in those who come to the study of a second language as beginners, but probably in intermediates and advanced students as well. Reduction in the speed of processing leads to a perceived increased difficulty of self-expression in the second language.

This in turn represents a threat to the learner's self-concept as a confident and competent user of language, and as a supplier of 'correct' answers.

The speed of language processing is linked to the degree of predictability of the language that is in use. After all, as Aitchison reminds us,

> One of the best-known facts about word recognition is that a lot of it is guesswork. People recognise words by choosing the 'best fit': they match the portion they have heard with the word in their mental lexicon that appears to be the most likely candidate, and they fill in gaps, often without noticing they do so (Aitchison, 1987, 178) [26].

Successful guesswork, however, is best founded on confidence. To the complete beginner, who has only just learned to claim the identity inherent in *Je m'appelle Jean,* response is easy. In the classroom situation it is possible to predict that for a short time at least, all questions will have to do with identity, and, when asked, *Je m'appelle Jean* is going to be the correct answer. Lexical and grammatical knowledge are here finely in tune with one another, and the utterance self-selects as there no alternative options. However, the intermediate student has a wider lexicon, though still one which is full of holes, and this coincides with a stage in development in which the grasp of some areas of grammar and idiom can be expected to be little more than sketchy:

> ...I recognise there are stages of development and in order to get beyond this basic stage you've got to have greater facility with the words and idiomatic expressions and that sort of thing, which only comes about with practice. Lack of repetitive use means you tend to revert to basic vocabulary most of the time. As much as anything else, this is due to a lack of opportunity outside of the class - I would almost never hear any. (2)

---

[25] See also McDonough 1981, P46 for a criticism of this interpretation.
[26] See also Warren, 1970.

This reversion to basic vocabulary and structure is a feature that many students are aware of, and which can cause intense levels of frustration and anxiety. Some strategy is called for to enable the student to survive this period, which is one of the more challenging in the language-learning process. Some people decide to cheat, and, when the activities are so structured as to allow this to happen, read ahead to see which will be 'their' question, and prepare an answer to it in advance. This gives the appearance of fluency, but is a strategy for appearing to be 'good' at the target language already, rather than for learning it successfully. This sort of speculative preparation concentrates the student's mind, by definition, on the selected question to the probable exclusion of all others, and so while apparently allowing the student to respond correctly to that one question, in reality reduces the likelihood of a correct response being given to any other. In point of fact, true long-term fluency will be better acquired by working slowly through the material now, and incorrectly if need be, so as to identify both acceptable and unacceptable patterns of response and eliminate as future options those which are spotlighted through recognised error. But this brings us back to the importance of error and the effect it can have upon the student's self-esteem.

> ... if we have only a limited knowledge of the language, then I believe that speaking the language can have a negative effect upon the way in which we feel, the image of ourselves which we project when speaking in the foreign language...we may become, for example, inhibited, shy, reserved, withdrawn, nervous, anxious, and so if we aren't confident, if we are not proficient in the language, then the effect it can have upon us, I feel, can be to limit us, make us less expressive, more inhibited... (15)

Intermediate learners need to find the courage to persevere in circumstances which regularly call their adult competence into question, while to make matters worse the evidence of progress is not constantly or uniformly to be seen. On a given day things can go far better or far worse than expected:

> I feel really stupid, because you just get to learn just how much you don't know. You are aware of how much you don't know, and you keep getting things wrong, and nothing makes sense and you find it really hard at first, and so you just feel stupid that you can't do it. But sometimes I go through my Spanish and I can translate things straight away into my head, without looking any words up, and it makes me feel really good, or I'll read books - I'll read the book..... where they tell you to join in a conversation with a Spanish person and I can get the other part correct, and that makes me feel good. And then other times I'll go and do Spanish and I can't get the tense right or I can't get some of the words right, I just forget the basics, things I learnt a long time back, and I just get so annoyed that I just can't do it, and it just seems like it's never going to come to me... so then you feel back to being stupid again, and that you won't learn the language. (27)

Those students who have progressed to an intermediate stage have not done so without a marked level of determination:

> Self-discipline is an important thing. You've got to force yourself to keep going, because there are barriers...it's like running up a hill or something, it's going to get hard at points, but you've just got to keep going. (4)

The compensation for all this effort can sometimes come when least expected:

> I'm not one for giving up part-way. I think learning a language initially is quite difficult, and then later on during the course you start to learn more and more things. You start to learn things in like, waves, so you can go through a really dry period and then all of a sudden everything seems to click. (8)

When things do seem to click, there is a boost in confidence, and a satisfaction which many find to be a great reward:

> Rather than feel this mass of grammar and vocabulary ahead of me as something still to learn, the language becomes sort of blocks that you become...you are in a stage of the language, and you reach that stage and you move on to the next, in a continuing progressing series of stages and no matter how fluent you are in a language there's always more to learn. English is my first language but there are still loads of words I've never known...I've never used and it's the same with a foreign language only more so. So I suppose as parts of the language begin to become familiar, then I suppose it's a case of gaining more confidence, and as your confidence increases then it's less a case of feeling daunted, but more ..er.. oh, well, that's another thing I've learned. (12)

These moments of breakthrough can be immensely rewarding, although the nature of the reward appears to be different according to the level of the students. While complete beginners often reported satisfaction at being able a few formulaic things in the target language, for the intermediate students the intensity of the experience was enhanced by a sense of difficulties faced and of challenges overcome:

> It is fun... a lot of fun. And it gives me self-respect. And there's the intellectual challenge, which I enjoy because it's so easy to sort of sink back when you're not challenged by anything and not do anything at all, and I enjoy the feeling that I'm exploring something new. I think it's opened a lot more doors to me ... I've become interested in a lot more things than I ever was interested in, and that I didn't really know about, and so I enjoy that. I feel pleased with myself when I've done something, and I really do enjoy it. (10)

Suddenly new perspectives begin to seem realistically possible:

> I feel clever, in a funny sort of way. Chuffed with myself. I get a bit full of myself because I'm making the effort and speaking German more than many people would. I'm still not at the point where I simultaneously translate, which is where I think I should be... dreaming in another language...(22)

> It's fun, and it's practical and there's the improvement of your self-image, for one thing, the ability to go to Spain and be able to speak to my daughter's friends or people in the market and things like that. At least I can make myself understood, and people appreciate that, and that in itself is a reward. (6)

It remains true that however much we may study together and, indeed, be taught together, what we learn we learn as individuals, in our own time, in our own ways, and giving the knowledge concerned our own idiosyncratic spin. But this does not happen in a vacuum, and the presence of a sympathetic tutor and fellow members of the learning group is of prime importance in making the experience a pleasant one:

> What makes it wonderful is the achievement, and it's quite exciting. It depends on who you're doing the language with, because it can be made very, very dull in some cases. A stimulating teacher does make a lot of difference when you learn a language, that's what can make the wonderful experience because it's exciting for you and you want to go on and do more. Enthusiastic support from group members as well as from the tutor -that's important, and you don't always get that from younger people - they're doing it because they've been good at it and that's the logical thing to do, but I don't think they always get the excitement from it. I didn't get the excitement from it when I was younger - it was just part of the school curriculum. It was just another subject, you did it because you had to. (3)

The function of the tutor is not limited to that of providing a sympathetic support - in practical terms, the importance of error as a pathway leading to development cannot be overstated, and the task of the tutor is to recognise and exploit this fact.

> We suggest, then, that a learner's incomplete understanding of what he or she is shown or told (what is perceived) is a vital basis for learning through instruction. Perhaps incomplete but relevant understanding of what children see adults doing and hear them saying is at the heart of what Vygotsky termed the Zone of Proximal Development. (Wood, 1991, 107)

In many ways Wood's "incomplete but relevant understanding" is a prime feature of all second-language learning. It is a mixed blessing, reminding the learner of what has been achieved while still making it plain that the journey is not over yet. That identification of the next stage of development is of crucial importance, and if we get it wrong as tutors, then our students will have little option but to remain as spectators, rather than participants.

A number of adults feel that there is something in adulthood itself, despite what has been said above concerning the negative effect that repeated errors and infantilisation can have on the learner's self-concept, which allows them to persevere and eventually triumph in the business of learning a language. In enumerating the qualities that were necessary to be good at a foreign language, the responses were wide-ranging, and many of them embraced adult qualities:

> Basic knowledge of another language. It helps if you have done another language before- it gives an insight into how the language is formed, and I think that helps. Being able to communicate. Having the interest, and dedication. As an adult you've really got to push yourself. You come because you really want to do it. I've been in classes with adults and youngsters and I've seen the adults leave the youngsters way behind, because they've got the desire, they want to learn, and the youngsters are just doing it as another subject.... I

> think it's quite difficult to do a language in a year, and I think an adult can cope with it more than a youngster, possibly because they're more mature, they apply themselves better, and they obviously really want to do it. With many youngsters it doesn't take much to put them off.... they come across an obstacle and that's it. They don't have the same dedication as an adult. (5)

It is interesting also to note that "knowledge of another language" here refers to another foreign language - it is not enough to have a native language of one's own. Indeed, one's native language, acquired as it is in different circumstances from those typical of adult second-language acquisition, may well be considered to be a different kind of knowledge, particularly among those whose educational circumstances added little to their understanding of the mechanics of their mother-tongue. Goethe would agree with this, of course, ("He who does not know at least one foreign language does not know his own") and indeed some of the appreciation for the value of language study among adult learners has to do with the increased cognitive understanding of the ways in which English functions.

> You need to have patience, perseverance, you have to have a desire to do it as well....
> Q> *So it depends on personality? We are either patient or we're not...*
> A> Exactly. (8)

This is echoed by the experience of another student:

> I don't like to be beaten by it - I like to sort of nag and nag and nag at something until it sorts itself out. Occasionally, as you know, I go through periods of thinking well, I haven't got any better these last couple of months, and then there's a lull and then suddenly I see something or do something and I think oh, it's all been there! (10)

You need to have a flair for languages, parental influence, teaching; it is no different from other subjects from the point of view of application. Learning another language requires massive application.... (2)

It helps if you have a good ear, and basic grammar in your own language so that you can work with it in a foreign language as well. You need a general interest in wanting to learn a language as well. Stamina - my daughter just opted out once it got really tough. (3)

Levels of motivation among intermediate adult students are generally high - as one would expect in circumstances involving people who are there not because they have to be, in order to achieve some qualification to improve their job prospects, but who are in the language-learning group rather for reasons of enjoyment.

Q> *So your attitude to language study changes with age, it is a generational thing? When you are 16 you look at language learning as you might look at the learning of anything else, partly a chore, and partly a responsibility, and partly a way of not doing woodwork?*

A> That's right, exactly, but as an adult you do it because you're choosing to do it and that's far nicer. I think that's also why you learn, because you want to do it - this is where some children feel terrible, because if you're in a group with people that are an awful lot better than you are, and it clams you up, for one thing, and then you feel that you are the dunce in the class - you just don't want to do anything.

Q> *And that is reinforced every lesson because the situation is not allowed to change. And that doesn't happen with an adult, you feel, or they're not aware of it happening?*

A> Oh, I think they're aware of it happening, you're aware perhaps that you're not so good as other people, but I think you can cope with it as an adult. You're learning as an adult, there because you want

> to do it, and you're not really competing with other people. You may be going on holiday and want to say a few words when you get there, read from the menu or something simple - I think you get your pleasure from that. It's to improve your own work at your own pace, not for reasons of competition. (3)

It is also fair to say that for a significant percentage of adult students the social aspects of regular attendance at a language class are positive factors, which can go some way towards compensating for increased difficulty in retaining new discoveries made in the classroom:

> I suppose it's a social thing, for me. I like coming to the class and meeting other people - I've made friends through the class... I enjoy the work, I enjoy the hours of not thinking about any problems I might have, or any worries, I just really do enjoy it. I can't think of any class that I have come out and the time hasn't zoomed by, and I've just enjoyed it. The biggest down side is that I don't make the progress that I'd like to make, but that's partly because I think that maybe I'm no longer quite as committed to going home and learning the vocabulary as I once was... and maybe I don't remember things quite as well now as I did a few years ago...[27] The down side is that I don't see myself progressing at any great rate, but I think that's partly my own fault... (6)

Increasing age is seen as a significant factor in complicating the learning process, and attempting to retain the new language is one more part of the process of adjustment. Remembering what has been studied is not a matter of will-power. It is a matter of practice, and the ability to drag a sought-after word or idiom to the front of one's mind as the result of intense concentration is not the same as the ability to maintain a normal exchange in the target language, and at normal speed. In an information age, forgetfulness is the cause of much anxiety, for it is taken to be a sign of debility and incompetence. It is taken as a weakness, even as a sign of losing one's grip. Losing

one's train of thought, or being unable to come up with the right word at the right time can make us feel as though our adult standing were being called into question. For those who are a few years older there is a greater awareness of the implications of the ageing process. Typical of the responses in the 65-75 age-group is this:

> It's not easy, now. I found it much easier of course when I was young, naturally .... I think it's memory - I can't retain it quite as well as I used to. I can cope with it in class, but if you ask me about it a half-hour later I'd probably have forgotten most of it, until I sit down and read it up again. I think at my age memory is not what it used to be. I find I can get up to go and do something and when I get where I want to be I've forgotten what I've gone for... and this is age. Nothing that I can do anything about. And I was just afraid that this would happen more in the language programme...um... it hasn't, not so far. I tend to go to bed at night and go over it at night, and so far it's been all right. Now whether it'll be easy to go on, I don't know. (9)[28]

Although students in their sixties and above do admit to some slowing down and reduced ability to remember new information, as do some in their fifties, others in their fifties and below appear not to have experienced this:

> I have not found concentration a problem, how some people say when you're young you pick it up quicker; I don't know if it does make a difference but even if it does I think motivation probably counteracts that as you get older. Even when you feel you are motivated, over the course of a year that doesn't go on an even line either - some weeks I might spend a lot of time on it, but other weeks I spend nil. (2)

[27] This interviewee was aged 65 at the time of the interview.
[28] This interviewee was aged 69 at the time of the interview.

> I haven't found it changing at all. Somebody told me that when you reach fifty your brain just goes, and I'm approaching fifty now and just waiting for this brain to go completely! If anything, in my forties I've probably learnt more quickly because I've been doing it because I wanted to...(3)

The majority of those interviewed agreed on the importance of memory in learning a new language, but also identified many other qualities which may be less subject to age-related change:

> A reasonably good memory, also a flexible mind (4)

> A good memory, the ability to sit down and learn things off by heart, the ability to practice. (11)

> Seeing a sequence in things helps. If you have a root you can build from it, and it's the same in maths. (9)

> The people who are better than I am... I think they're more intelligent, and I think that some of them have a much better background in English, and English ... I think that Latin gives you a very good grounding in grammar and how language is ... I don't know... arranged, for want of a better word. (6)

> Passion for language. (1)

> I think this nebulous thing called an ear for a language, as you have an ear for music. As a child I could mimic more or less any dialect, and as an adult as well, and I think a language is nothing more than mimicking. (7)

Perhaps the qualities demanded of an adult second-language learner are summed up most succinctly, and most realistically, as:

> a natural inclination towards foreign languages and a genuine interest or desire to learn. I believe any person can be good if immersed in a foreign language, but if you are learning it in England then you need patience, an analytical mind, and not being afraid to have a go. (12)

This uninhibited approach does not always come easily to English adults, but there are those who relish the opportunity:

> It's something that you can lose any kind of natural reticence that you have... you just throw yourself into it and become - I think - barmy, as barmy as they are! I like to open up into a completely different barminess, a completely different way of looking at life, of living life. (35)

If, in Polanyi's terms, a skill is improved by alternate dismemberment and articulation, then increased skill in language use is a process which necessarily requires constant recreation, not only of hypotheses concerning the underlying structures, but also as a result of the sheer volume of the lexical burden that is required for effective communication. Whereas early target-language use, up to and including the level of GCSE, is essentially predictable and contained within the framework of a syllabus, language work post-GCSE and in real life introduces seemingly random elements of construction and vocabulary.

> I'm probably less fluent now in basic areas than I was this time last year, because we are covering such a vastly increased area of vocabulary. If you are not using these basic vocabulary areas they are lost to you, so you are starting again each year, albeit from a higher base. A-level work is not only much harder in itself, it is also much more random, and you have much less control over the demands the language will make of you. This is what language is, it is not all in little parcels, is it? (2)

The real moment of truth comes for most adult students when they find themselves in a country where they have the opportunity - and sometimes the need - to communicate with other people by means of the language that they have been studying. The significance of error now goes beyond the classroom limitations, and it can have serious consequences. As a result, the tendency is often to take a tentative approach, at least until confidence grows.

> I may be wrong, but I feel that the Spaniards think it's a damn nuisance, because they can either speak a bit of English or at least whatever it is in the shop, you don't even need to speak the language, and particularly if the place is busy I feel it's probably a source of irritation as you're stumbling along going slowly and trying, wanting to practice and so forth which may not fit in... in other more relaxed situations they may be happy that you're making the effort to speak it, which most people don't. It gives satisfaction, and I would prefer it if they let you continue in Spanish. (2)

After all, it is not appropriate behaviour in situations of informal conversation to pack your speech with information and deliver it in formal complete sentences:

> There are situations where accuracy is important, e.g. medical problems abroad, but in terms of general conversation you make yourself understood but don't participate in any interesting conversation in any way if you stick to being basic and accurate. Ideally you could be both, but there are many situations where the accuracy is the more important. (2)

However, the rewards of successful communication are immediate and obvious - a great sense of satisfaction, sometimes tinged with surprise, to find that the language works outside the classroom as well. There are further benefits in terms of broadened cognitive awareness, although remembering an experience and remembering the language associated with it are two different things:

> I think you believe that you're better when you come back again, because you've actually been there, and there's a little bit of the culture and things like that, and you've been there and you "know" an area - you know where it is, and what you're talking about. I was fascinated by the Spanish graveyards - you come back and you think, that's something that is completely different. The cultural side of things is important as well. (3)

Suddenly the newly-acquired language skill is seen to be important as a catalyst to allow other things to happen, and other levels of understanding and communication to be achieved.

> I just felt it was so much better to be able to speak to people, however poorly, in their own language..... and I do find difficulty in a foreign country not to read everything that I pass, as I'm driving along it's impossible for me not to read - I don't read it aloud, thank goodness for that - but I do find difficulty not to read things, and I think I would find it very frustrating if I was in Greece, for example, or Iran or somewhere I couldn't even make out the .... when I read in a language that has the same alphabet, as it were, then I sort of sit thinking about... and I say oh, I know what that means. It's like doing a crossword puzzle. I like making the connections. (10)

These new communicative skills can heighten the pleasure of being in another country, as well as the understanding of certain cultural events:

> Q> *They're important things to be able to say, aren't they?*
> A> Yes, they are, really, yes. And it had just been a fiesta in Zaragoza, and she was telling me about the little boy having been dressed in national costume, and because I'd been there and had heard those words spoken I was aware of what she was saying about that, and eventually she showed me a photograph of him in his

> Aragonese costume...men and little boys wear it, a sort of jodhpur type thing and a little velvet waistcoat... (6)

The unpredictability of life is such that the ability to communicate in a second language can alter the whole course of people's lives:

> Later in the army, I tried to learn languages wherever I went - Cantonese in Hong Kong, German in Germany, and this interest was at first just street language, shallow, just enough for bar-room daily conversations ...it got deeper and deeper from there until later in life I went to Germany to work for 3 years. (4)

Out of the process of learning the language in its natural context, there arises an echo of our childhood exploration of the world through language itself:

> I think very often if you have heard things used in Spain by Spanish people at a particular instance, you can recall the instance as much as anything, and the words just come trotting out... again, it might be something that you've seen written down, which would come out as a quotation, almost... certain phrases come out without thinking. (10)

Here we see the experience that language has made possible having an effect upon the learners' cognitive patterns. With the involvement of the learner who engages with the world in which the target language is the main linguistic currency, we see at work the process by which

> ... mind engenders truth upon reality... our minds are not here simply to copy a reality that is already complete. They are here to complete it, to add to its importance by their own remodelling of it, to decant its contents over, so to speak, into a more significant shape. (William James, cited in Perry, 1935).

Acquisition of a new language is therefore indicative of the individual's growth - the achievement is not merely a social phenomenon but also a personal one. And it is an achievement that has come about as the result of a great deal of committed engagement with the learning process, a striving to make sense of

> ...this feeling that there is a din in the brain, that in the spells between speaking the new foreign language, that one is processing all sorts of ideas, savouring phrases one might use later on, or pondering over things one has heard in conversation, or in some way monitoring the grammar one used when one last said something in that foreign language... trying to work out how one might have said it better, how one might have integrated it into a different kind of sentence, so I think there is quite a ... an ongoing buzz of mental activity in between the spells in which one is actively using the foreign language (20)

It is this act of engagement with the din in the brain which makes possible the transition from intermediate to advanced student, as we shall see in Chapter 9.

CHAPTER 9

THE ADVANCED STUDENT/ PRACTITIONER

We have seen in Chapters 7 and 8 how the entire process of attempting to communicate in the target language is substantially different from that of communicating in the mother tongue. Among the objectively discernible differences are the motor skills involved - making some new sounds that are not a feature of mother-tongue usage; while subjective reactions include feelings that native speakers of the target language speak more quickly than their English-speaking counterparts and that listening therefore needs to happen faster; feelings of inadequacy at being unable to process the target language at speeds approaching the norm for mother-tongue converse, and so on. The overall effect of learning a second language as an adult has been that of exposing oneself to sensations of inadequacy and infantilisation, with the unease and frustration that such responses can be expected to produce in an adult who is used to feeling and behaving, through language, as a more or less competent, more or less matured individual, able to express feelings and needs in significant ways and able also to provoke a desired response through language use - able, in other words, to exert a measure of control on one's surroundings through language.

This chapter records the feelings of those who, despite the difficulties and challenges referred to in earlier chapters, have succeeded in attaining levels of foreign language proficiency which begin to approach those of the mother-tongue, at least in so far as the sensations of inadequacy and infantilisation are reduced, although they may not disappear entirely. Throughout Section Two, students have reported feelings of strangeness, of feeling somehow inhibited, or constrained, or in some way *different* when it comes to using a second language. We will see in what follows that the feelings of difference remain as part of the common experience of second-language use, but that they undergo a change, becoming a positive and liberating thing, rather than a source of unease or discomfort. Steiner describes the situation well:

> ...the retrievability of different tongues in the speech acts of the polyglot is, in crucial part, a function of the environment. Different moods, different social settings, different locations strongly modify the sense of linguistic priority. When I have spent a few days in a country in which one of my 'first' languages is native, I not only find myself re-entering that language with a strong sensation of recollected fluency and central logic, but soon have my dreams in it. In a short time-interval the language which I have been speaking in another country takes on a tangible shell of strangeness.....The external world 'reaches in' at every instant to touch and regroup the layers of our speech. (Steiner 1975, 291-2)

The implications of this on the value of learning the target language in an environment in which it is constant currency are clear to see, as are the practical results. The target language is normally well-learned in an authentic national context, as hypotheses. about novel details of the world and about the target language itself are formed through language and not merely as a result of immersion in the linguistic context.

> Words evoke differing feelings and images, for example, *familia* in Spanish has a different feel to it than *family* in English, for me. The word *patria* has a very strong connotation for me but I wouldn't ever use it in Spanish to refer to England! (40)

There are powerful echoes here of Hoffman's observation of the differences between our emotional response to cognates:

> ...the problem is that the signifier has become severed fom the signified. The words I learn now don't stand for things in the same unquestioned way they did in my native tongue. "River" in Polish was a vital sound, energized with the essence of riverhood, of my rivers, of my being immersed in rivers. "River" in English is cold - a word without an aura. It has no accumulated associations for me,

> and it does not give off the radiating haze of connotation. It does not evoke. (Hoffman 1989, 106)

Perceptions that are acquired in this way are therefore representations, rather than samples, of reality. This is particularly and obviously true of reading and listening skills, but it may also be true of writing and speaking, that the hypothesis of reality is elaborated through the activity of language use. The world acts as a perpetual trigger to cerebral activity:

> My year abroad at university was spent as an assistant in a Parisian suburb, and I got into a music crowd ... I met some jazz musicians and spent most of my spare time with them, and came home speaking very slangy French... which probably wasn't very good, but then again no-one speaks like Voltaire any more, which is what they teach you to do at university (12)

There are echoes in all of this of Piaget's middle course between empiricism and rationalism, when he argues that the mind does impose a grid on experience, but that this grid is itself constructed out of experience, rather than being innate. For Piaget, experience builds up new cognitive structures only through the schemes established up to the present. Over time the schemes transform themselves to create more powerful systems of mental representation. However, any new cognitive growth such as second-language development is going to affect other cognitive structures besides the purely linguistic ones.

In many ways, what is being described here is similar to what happens as a motor skill is acquired. Chapter 7 referred to the initial difficulties encountered by adult second-language learners as they struggle to produce the required sounds in the required order. Argyle describes the perfection of a motor skill in terms strongly reminiscent of those wonderful moments when the second language becomes effortless and the learner is aware that something of enormous importance - and enormously rewarding - is going on:

> When a motor skill has been perfected, it is faster, movements are more accurate, unnecessary movements are eliminated, conscious awareness is much reduced, tension is reduced or sometimes focused at points of difficulty, there is less need for feedback together with danger of becoming mechanical, and the whole operation is smoother, effortless and more effective. (Argyle, 1983, 57)

As the skills increase, there is a corresponding decrease in feelings of inadequacy and infantilisation. Garret reminds us of the speed and automaticity of normal sentence processing, which is imposed on us by the rapidity of normal speech, or for that matter, of normal reading. We must process as we hear or as we read, rather than waiting for the end of a sentence to undertake some analysis[29], as otherwise our memory would "...be quickly overloaded and early words in the sentence lost before their structural relation to later words could be established...the next input is being presented before the echoes of the last have begun to fade" (Garret, 1990, 134.) This memory overload was a significant part of the problems of the beginner and, indeed, of the intermediate learner, for as long as the processing of the target language was significantly below the speed of the same process in the mother tongue. There is great safety associated with the mother tongue, and for many people this feeling of safety is never equalled in another language:

> My father was far more extrovert when he was amongst his friends and speaking Polish than he was...(when speaking English)...I think probably he was very reticent really, and possibly I always thought that he was just a quiet person but it was probably that, because definitely when he got with his Polish-speaking friends there was a different side to his personality (3)

However, for others the reverse is true, and the experience of communicating in another language is an immensely liberating one:

> Father was a natural linguist, who spoke good French, some Spanish, some Italian. Speaking foreign languages seems a great liberation to Father. He is the person whom I have seen come most alive when he is communicating with foreigners. It seems a great liberation, and he seems to communicate beyond himself - I can't really explain it, but it's ... a huge liberation from his English self, and he very obviously seems quite a different person. This is something I noticed when I was quite young, and continue to notice. (19)

It is clear that for both these fathers there was something inhibiting about the business of speaking English, and something correspondingly liberating about speaking some other language. This may have been a result of the intricacies of the language itself, or because of the social context in which English was spoken, or a combination of these and other factors. It might possibly be a generational phenomenon, or the interpretation of parental behaviour by the comparatively young, but there are many instances of the same changes being reported by parents of their children:

> My daughter - absolutely! Totally! First of all she's a different person in Spain, totally, she seems to lose all her English inhibitions. It's absolutely strange, but she becomes much much more vivacious, much more using her arms, much more argumentative, much more alive... it's really strange and I've noticed it from the very beginning. And she herself says that she's two different people, she's one person in England and a different person in Spain....
> Q> *And does she switch this off when she comes back to England?*
> A> Not as much now as she did at first. It allowed her to develop a side of her that wasn't developed in England, and I can't explain it any more than that. She'd always been rather studious, and rather reserved, and going to Spain released her from all of that, and she suddenly was able to be a different person. Now, which is the real

[29] See Chapter 2 above for observations on the processing of garden path sentences.

Julie, I suspect it's the one in Spain, and she's there all the time, so I think that that's her, really.

Q> *And if she's in Spain, with you, speaking English, it is still this Spanish Julie that is more manifest?*

A> Much much more, yes. And that is much more manifest here now than it was at first. At first it was as though there'd been a sort of revolution, almost, she'd sort of changed dramatically, I felt..

Q> *It can't be as simple as the change of language unlocking some different aspect of the personality?*

A> I think that people's expectations of her here were one thing, and when she went there they had no expectations and she was able then to develop to be maybe as she had always wanted to be instead of being a very studious rather quiet girl who never really ... university started the change a little bit but it was definitely going to live in Spain that altered her. (6)

As ever, it is instructive to look at dysfunction in an attempt to understand function - at a non-pathological level, we may be seeing here an echo of what Matulis, in the context of studies of schizophrenia, describes as a linguistic tranquilliser

> ... this new foreign reality would not possess any of the past conflicts, hostility, threats and unbearable emotional injuries...it would provide the schizophrenic patient with a temporary linguistic shelter from any emotional turmoil. (Matulis, 1977, 23.)

It appears that what is being reported here is something new. With the decrease in feelings of inadequacy and infantilisation, there is a corresponding decrease in the differences between the qualitative experience of speaking one language rather than another. As the mastery increases, so one grows progressively less aware of finding one language significantly more difficult than the other. Something else, however, now begins to be reported - not by all the interviewees, but by many. It is an increase in awareness of affective differences attendant on the choice of language:

> I think that I do feel different, er... let me say first of all with French, because in a sense I am beginning to wonder which is my first language and which is my second language... the one difference I have noted is that I tend possibly - because that is what other people have told me anyway - to become more excitable when I speak French, and to use my hands more, not at all deliberately or knowingly. I just do. So in a way I think that as language in any case expresses more than just a way to say what a word means, or an object is by making a particular sound - I think it expresses something of the culture, of course, of the people who speak it - that doesn't surprise me, in a way. I'm not saying my character changes when I speak French, but em... I tend to revert to even the way in which people in France speak, i.e. with much more mimicry than the English do.... In terms of feeling different... I suppose I feel certainly closer to the country and the people who speak it, I feel more of an affinity. I also feel, quite frankly, quite proud sometimes, that I can speak all those languages, but em... maybe I feel that I am more French when I speak French, I am more Spanish when I speak Spanish, and of course more English when I speak English. (25)

There are those who go further, and claim that even their character does indeed change in line with the language that they happen to be speaking:

> Well, when I'm in Spain or Ecuador, I feel that I think, behave and operate in a significantly different manner, much more akin to the way in which the local people think, operate, behave, gesticulate etc. .... In Spanish I feel that I can say things to people that I wouldn't dream of saying in English. I feel this even when I am in England. (26)

Different languages, then, are used for the expression of different ideas or feelings which might not always find identical expression in mother-tongue. The sense of difference which at one level appears to arise out of feelings of increased social

freedom, brings with it, paradoxically, anxieties that are an intensified version of what has been noted at earlier stages of development - the desire to express coherently, exactly and only what one has in mind:

> I think it's inevitable that there is a "feeling different"... when one is competent in a language, the feeling different is to do with attempting linguistically and intellectually to integrate with the foreign culture, whereas when the language is poorly known, the feeling is probably more of a ...a certain exhilaration, at...as it were, attempting to conquer new ground, to express ideas that you have never expressed before in that way, so there is a certain challenge and excitement, also inevitably, I think as well, an anxiety that one won't understand the reply, or that one will not have communicated quite the idea that one thought one was communicating, so that there is that element of anxiety as well as of challenge. (20)

Similar questions were raised in the context of one interviewee's memories of the Mass in Latin, in which the adoption of a different language from the norm allowed for a certain degree of distance to be put between everyday experience and the exceptional:

> It struck me as rather bizarre that people who did not normally communicate in this language should try to respond and recite and chant and generally acquit themselves in a language that obviously wasn't theirs, and they didn't feel particularly at home with.... People were using a language in which the words did not have everyday connotations, and so therefore it allowed them to be uplifted from their ordinary lives, and to reach some kind of emotional spirituality which they couldn't otherwise. It was something different, whereas once you start repeating English words they have other mundane, everyday connotations, and inevitably they are a distraction. The Latin enabled one to... the words were there, but they were not in themselves meaningful, I think is what I mean. They enabled you

> almost to clear the mind - to concentrate the mind and clear the mind at the same time, which normal language doesn't allow you to do... (19) [30]

However, in addition to feelings of relief, brought about by the absence of negative components of human interaction, the change from one language to another also involves the assumption of a new set of characteristics of which the speaker claims frequently to be aware:

> Yeah, I definitely feel different when speaking the other languages I speak ..... To say precisely how is a different matter... a rather more complex matter. It feels as if I'm inhabiting a different body for a start, when speaking a foreign language...mm? My gestures definitely change, my facial expression changes... the cliché about French people pouting a great deal clearly has to do with the pronunciation of the French language... you have to pout and make other extravagant ... um... gestures, facial and otherwise, in order, I think, to speak, let us say French, successfully...erm... it's almost like acting. (20)

That the quality of these changes has its roots in the social peculiarities of the context in which the second language is to be used is borne out by the feelings of two highly competent practitioners, one of whom is French, the other Spanish, and whose observations concern what it feels like for them to be immersed in an English-speaking medium:

> I feel a little more slow and hesitant, especially in public. A little less confident and comfortable. On the other hand, more polite as well, being careful not to offend anybody by using the wrong sort or level of language, possibly a bit more careful with the humour as

[30] There is here an interesting echo of what Evans observes in relation to the value of words in a new language, when he says that they "will not have the same depth or resonance, but they will be in some sense innocent, fresh, free of all the accretions which characterise the words of the mother tongue, *les mots de la tribu.*" (Evans, 1988)

well, hoping to get it right, as it's not so clear what is acceptable... difficulties with slang and that sort of thing. Perhaps a little less spontaneous, therefore, less extrovert, less immediate than in French ...The personality change - I think on the whole I perhaps seem a bit more distant, because of these difficulties - a bit more aloof, reserved, possibly because the language is a whole set of things - body language... when you are among French people you're able to touch the person, you're able to kiss the person, a whole series of body aspects, and the greetings and so on are more immediate than they are in English. (37)

I do believe we change, and we adopt certain cultural patterns of the country whose language we are using, even more so if the speaker is actually living in the country. We start changing, or becoming more adaptable, the moment we start studying the language. A proof of this are the dialogues a beginner has to learn, and the acceptable behaviour patterns attached, for example: the importance of saying Thank you - its widespread use seems excessive to the Spanish national. I even thank the bus driver - this seemed really odd to me at first. (38)

However, the English social context is not always seen as inhibiting, at least not by English students analysing the reactions of others

Q> *Do you think other people change in any way when they use their second or third language?*
A> I think some do, I think some don't. I think it largely depends on the sensitivity of the people to their environment and their need and their wishes to get on in the environment they're in. I think quite a lot of German people who have come to England have adapted to the English way of life and yes, have become very much more relaxed. (17)

If the business of learning to use the English language within a British context is sometimes seen as an inhibiting one for the non-anglophone, the opportunity to throw off the shackles of Britishness can come as in immense release. In connection with this, it is profoundly interesting that where this 'second identity' has been reported by students whose cultural background is English, it is always seen as a positive thing - the person is more relaxed, less inhibited, funnier, simplified, even, (Garrison Keillor describes himself as being 'dumber, sweeter') than when operating in the mother tongue, if the mother tongue is English. Not everyone claims to have perceived a second identity in others, or to have experienced it themselves, but those who have speak of it with enthusiasm.

The identity question seems to be separate in their minds from the fact that a second-language use is slower and more demanding than mother-tongue use. Those who do not acknowledge any feeling of different identity seem to explain the whole contrast between mother tongue and target language in terms of mental and physical difficulty alone.

To stay for a while with those who admit to the change:

> I would love to be Spanish, you see, you take on - well, I take on a different personality. I get a thrill out of speaking Spanish, and if I can do it well, so much the better....I think it's all to do with the language. I've found it so much more expressive... it's a lovely language... it's the poetry. it's the music of the words, as well as the meaning of them although you're not really concerned with the meaning when you're speaking .... it's.. I don't know, I suppose it's the passionate side of it.
>
> Q> *And does that get a chance to come out in normal conversation about... problems with the railway system, for instance?*
>
> A> There is enough passion in whatever it is that makes the language itself... yes, and I think it's lacking in English... English is too mundane, it's too much on one level, whereas in Spanish you've got whoosh! and spikes and peaks... (7)

For some, the implications of all this are, potentially, extremely far-reaching:

> .... it is something that in some ways has worried me. When I was a student, I remember thinking that it was quite likely that I would end up marrying a Spaniard, or rather a Spanish-speaking person, because many of my friends were Spanish, and I do remember thinking that if that was the case, if that were to happen, that I would have to be the person that I am when I speak Spanish, for the rest of my life, and I remember thinking... wondering whether I could cope with that. (19)

For others, for whom the experience of operating in another language is already a thing of the past, and thus with fewer implications for the future, the experience is still emphatically reported as a liberating one. Evans seems to have hit the nail on the head when he suggests that "....it seems that language learners may be less resistant than most to changes in the ego brought about by changes in language." (Evans, 1988, 82) Not only is the resistance to any permeability of the ego boundary minimal on occasion, but the changes in the ego are experienced as highly positive:

> Yes, I could say things which I would never say in English. I could be more bold in Spanish than in English. I could say things in Spanish and feel more at ease than if I were saying the same thing in English. I never understood why.
> Q: *You feel you had greater freedom in Spanish than in English?*
> A. Yes.
> Q: *Even though the language was more difficult to use?*
> A: Yes. ...Especially when I had a good grasp on the language, it felt as though I could express myself easier, and also challenge people to do things which I would not so much with ease...when doing in English.
> Q: *What sort of challenges are you thinking of?*

A: Well, workers, you know... just asking them to do things which I would normally do myself... or I'd be too frightened to ask them to do it... I don't want to put you to trouble...

Q: *But Spanish somehow got you over that...?*

A: It did, yes.

Q: *Was Dominica a very different society - is it a more easy-going society than our own?*

A: People are more friendly... I lived in this particular village and everyone knew everyone else, and I kind of just felt that I belonged there, 'cause everyone accepted me... (8)

It remains true that identities are not primarily the private property of individuals, however much we may behave as though we thought they were. They are social constructions in large measure, and are a sum of responses to the demands of the social environment in which they originally evolve, and of the - sometimes other - environment in which they are required to perform.

There are stages in which we are still self-conscious though highly competent users of someone else's language:

> I think my feelings are that what happens when we speak another language is there is a great deal of imitation taking place. There is conscious imitation and also subconscious imitation, both in the way we speak, in the tone of voice, intonation, use of gestures, facial expressions, and all of this contributes to influencing the sort of person that we are, or that we project ourselves to be, whilst we are speaking the foreign language. This is particularly so, I feel, when talking with a native speaker, and is particularly accentuated when we are actually in the country and surrounded by these influences which we have absorbed and used to produce the way of speaking which we then adopt when using the foreign language. (15)

The importance of this mimicry cannot be overstated:

> ... if you don't bother to put in the non-linguistic characteristics, then you end up with something, I think, which is not entirely the foreign language that you are aiming to speak. Pouting, I suppose, is a case in point. Because of all the cultural associations that we as English people... because of all the cultural and social associations that we make with certain types of facial expression, certain types of gesture, there is an obstacle for mother-tongue speakers of English to overcome in trying to speak a language like French successfully. It seems odd to us to make certain ..um.. gestures with the face - pouting is one of them - but you have to in order to say some words properly - in a way which is French, in order to inhabit a sort of French physique (20)

This view is supported by Guiora, (1972) who sees pronunciation in particular, rather than language ability per se, as a sign of permeability of the ego boundary, the capacity for temporary fusion of self/object boundaries.

This strikes an immediate chord with a number of interviewees, who report other physical changes as well:

> I also find that I physically - physically - can not speak Italian without using my arms, without using my shoulders, my hands, my eyebrows, and these are things that I don't think I'm copying. I don't think I'm parodying... in any way at all. I think what I'm doing is letting the words, the thoughts.... letting the feelings that create the thought make those thoughts in the most... erm...effective way. (35)

The difficulty remains of those who speak the FL grammatically but still retain an accent. This does not imply a sliding scale of potential empathy, but is a reminder that it is phonology which provides the strongest evidence that foreign-language acquisition may be age-constrained. (Lennon, 1993) On the other hand, empathy with a particular language is an important factor:

> I don't feel I've appropriated the language for myself, I haven't made it my own. When I speak it (French) I don't really let go of my Englishness. I suppose I feel like an English person playing around with foreign words. It's not that conscious, but it is more that slightly removed, dispassionate feeling towards it. I quite enjoy the words... the sounds... and grouping them into appropriate bunches so that they make some sense and elicit the right kind of response, but I very rarely felt that this is much more than a fairly elaborate linguistic exercise. I'm very happy to be seen as an English person speaking reasonably competent French.... I just don't feel that the language has ever really got under my skin. (19)

Learning a second language means being able to take on aspects of a new identity and accept modification of one of the basic modes of identification by the self and others; the way we sound:

> When I'm speaking French I tend to pout more...erm... for some strange reason. I think it's just the vowel sounds... I also find that when I speak a foreign language my voice... the pitch of my voice is raised tremendously. Don't know why that is, because my normal English-speaking voice is quite deep... (30)

Incidentally, this is very important when we hear our own voices recorded for the first time, and we are inclined to disown them as somehow not "sounding right". This social identity in context is structured and reflected by language use - the two are inescapably interrelated. English society is shot through with linguistic markers of class and status. The obvious examples are those of accent and the observation of acceptable grammatical rules, but there are still vestigial markers of the importance of naming things correctly according to social context - (is it a sitting-room, a drawing-room, or a lounge ?) - and therefore, of course, of the dangers of misnaming. The foreigner, on the other hand, is expected to get things wrong, and the subjective

experience of not being right - disturbing to the beginner - may paradoxically have a certain level of advantage to the more advanced student.

Giles and Coupland have pointed out that

> ...(s)ocial identity is built around a sequence of processes which can be expressed as follows: Social categorisation of the world involves knowledge of our membership in certain social categories. This knowledge...is defined as our social identity and has meaning only in social comparison with other relevant groups. (Giles and Coupland, 1991, 104)

As social identity forms an important part of the self-concept, the temporary abandoning of an interpretable social identity - so daunting to the beginner - can now be liberating:

> It might be that not having complete mastery of the language is a liberating thing, because I certainly do feel freer and a bit more liberated in the sense that perhaps I'm slightly less responsible for what I'm saying... the words flow out but I think that there is a slight gap between what I want to say and what I've actually said, and I'm not always certain how my sentences are going to turn out. If it goes slightly wrong, it's excusable... um, maybe I'm less judged by people, their reaction is less judgmental, because I'm not Spanish... (19)

Whereas for some the fact of using another language in context was a liberating thing that appeared to be spontaneous in the freedoms that arose from it, for others there was the awareness of second-language use as a performance - a deliberate assumption of a role - with the attendant excitement that comes from relinquishing one's own identity and the standards and responsibilities that are normally expected, and reinterpreting oneself by virtue of the language spoken. This has already been hinted at above (page 6), but is supported by a number of others:

> I feel really different, and probably the nearest I can come to it is Stanislawski's emotion memory... in which part of the taking on of the persona of the character that you play involves relating to your own emotional responses in similar contexts..... (36)

> Yes, I believe I do change, certainly when I speak Spanish, because I think subconsciously I regard it as a performance, and therefore because I lived in Madrid for so long I take on the mannerisms and gestures and probably vocal habits of the people of Madrid. I don't think that happens with everybody, probably... I think it's quite possible to speak the language technically very well indeed without ever entering into the personality of the native speakers... just in the same way that it is possible to perform technically to a very high standard and yet not be really what we would call a performer, as such. I think that that's probably because it's both a psychological and a physiological happening ..... (36)

For others the shift from one language to another is less self-conscious, and more utilitarian. From this point of view, studying a second language can be like someone slipping out of one dialect for reasons of social context and into another - identity can be carried in the original variety of language, while a second language (and a second layer of identity) is assumed for purely instrumental reasons:

> My third language, Spanish, having learned it as an adult.... I tend to be more of a listener. I'm quieter, I'm less... er.. I'm more hesitant, less confident than I am when I'm speaking German... This again, I think, if I was over there longer, would affect my personality when I was talking to a Spanish person. I think the approach would be totally different, and my whole attitude to life would adapt slightly in order to accommodate the attitudes of the people I'm speaking to when I'm in Spain. These changes of character occur when I'm in Germany, and I can see them just beginning to occur when I'm in

> Spain as well. I'm not sure if they occur when I'm speaking to foreign people in England. It really depends on the person I'm speaking to, and the relationship we have, but certainly I feel that people do change when they are using their other language in the other country for purposes of surviving, getting on with people, being liked. (17)

For others, it is less a matter of survival, and more a question of a pragmatic approach to the communicative requirements of the situation. This requires a high level of expertise, but as Vygotsky reminds us

> Performing an automatic act presents the mind with no problem. The absence of difficulty means the absence of need, and therefore, no consciousness. (Vygotsky ,1987, 86)

This is indeed how we appear to operate most of the time in our mother tongue. It is only when concentration is required that we tend to find the use of our native language tiring, and slowed down by need for concentration, not unlike slow and deliberate delivery in the early stages of second-language competence However, it is possible to attain degrees of competence in a second language which mean that the transition is effortless, although by the time this happens the student has ceased for practical purposes to be a mere learner of the target language, and has become essentially a practitioner:

> I'm still the same person, but it's like having a switch in your head and you switch from one language to another. I'm still just the same person, just in a different mode of operation. (Gestures to show switch)
> Q> *So it's more like a different programme, rather than the radical change of an actor who goes on to a different stage in a different play?*
> A> Yes, that's right (4).

The effect that throwing this switch successfully can have is sometimes disconcerting. When all the cultural and linguistic properties that have been so painfully learned over the years are given the opportunity to come together and be displayed in context, the ego boundaries become permeable, to use Guiora's term, the student accomplishes an excursion into a different reality, and the overall effect is considerable:

> I know I've been told by several people I'm quite close to, that when speaking other languages it's not me who's speaking... people have said to me afterwards that... that that wasn't you, that wasn't like you at all , and this has been particularly the case when I'm speaking Spanish. I've been... it was an accusation, I've been accused of being somebody else, playing a Spaniard, erm, which at first I took as something of an insult, but then when I thought about it, it occurred to me that, well, in order to speak the language you've got to be non-verbal as well as verbal. You've got to put yourself into... at any rate what you imagine to be the role of a natural speaker of that language, and this is one way of achieving ... authenticity in speaking a foreign language.... (20)

The self is often talked of as though it were unitary, but as we saw in Chapter 1 (Figure 1.1 and Figure 1.2) we have many different social selves that we adopt when acting out different social roles and interacting with different people These selves tend not to be calculated or consciously fabricated, but seem to be rather a matter of habit. Underneath all this is the feeling that a real core self, distinct from such outward displays, exists and is perhaps more of a unified whole than the sum of the superficial adaptations. This self contains impulses that seem at times to operate beyond one's control, together with ideals, aspirations and standards that are set apart from the rest, and it seems to vary somewhat according to our moods. For Carl Rogers, the self is clearly a gestalt, a configuration in which the alteration of one minor aspect could completely alter the whole pattern. The shift from one language to another is far from being a minor aspect. Far too much work has gone into the assimilation of the second language for the shift not to have some palpable effects. At an everyday level, of course, the paradox of personal identity - the fact that at any

moment we are the same as, yet different from, the persons we once were, or ever will be again, has inspired many attempts at resolution. However, there are instances of quite normal dichotomies finding a language-specific expression:

> When I have something that is worrying me, something that I need to resolve, I often find myself speaking aloud, and arguing out the possible alternative courses of action. This sometimes happens in two different languages....
> Q> *So you use one language for each point of view?*
> A> Yes, that's right. I may argue for something in English, and against it, say, in Italian...or German...
> Q> *And do you ever argue with yourself just in languages other than English, or is English always one of them?*
> A> Oh no, I think English is always one of them... (39)

In the picture portrayed in this interview, we see one aspect of the self remaining safely rooted in the mother-tongue, while the second languages are used as a discrete thinking tool which enables some distance to be introduced between the thinker and her problem. This distance arguably provides an element of objectivity, which might enable the problem to be reinterpreted and therefore solved.

Sometimes the feeling of different aspects of the personality coming to the fore jointly with a particular choice of language is so strong that it is associated in the memory with other more physical changes. Whether or not the fine details of this recollection are strictly accurate, the recollection is highly suggestive of a language-related shift in persona:

> I had a room-mate from Puerto Rico who seemed to have a dual personality. When she spoke Spanish she was very feminine, she wore her hair loose, spoke very softly, she would wear skirts, and then, on the same day, or minutes later, she could be completely different, she spoke English perfectly fluently as well, but she had a strong New York accent, her hair was usually up, she might be

> smoking a Gauloise without a tip, looking very masculine, very tomboy, wearing jeans, sitting in a very masculine way, very ...aggressive, even, at times, and had this sort of harsh manner. I had never come across this and I absolutely wondered at the complete... change - the whole thing that went with the different language, how it was the basis of all the manifestations that went with it. But she was perfectly at ease in both roles, and it was as if she was playing two completely different parts, and could move freely from one to the other when the mood took her. (37)

Although our notion of our self appears to be firm and stable, it is constantly forming and reforming. In other words, it is a process. If this process goes wrong, and there is a discrepancy between the real and the ideal self, there may be withdrawal. In terms of the early years of attendance at a foreign-language class, such discrepancy is felt as an element of cognitive dissonance between the learner's normal experience of linguistic competence (in mother tongue) and relative ineptitude in the target language. When the level of dissonance becomes intolerable - and these thresholds vary enormously from person to person - the student stops attending classes. This type of drop-out is not inevitable, and growth is not only possible but central to the purpose of the organism. However, there is also a tendency to modify the self-concept so as to bring it into line with reality as we perceive it to be, and so the struggling student may revise self-concepts of competence downwards, beginning to believe that they were perhaps not so able or intelligent or versatile as had been hoped.

This brings us back to the question, raised earlier in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, of whether language is simply grafted on top of cognition as a way of sticking communicable labels on to our thoughts (Fodor 1975, Piaget 1926). Alternatively, does learning a language somehow mean learning to think in that language? Adults think in terms of images and abstract logical propositions, not just words. It is possible that there may be fundamental differences in thought processes which correspond in some way to the different languages that people speak, but if it is true, it remains as yet undocumented and unproved. This does not mean that the experience of expressing one's thoughts and feelings through different languages is the same

(assuming comparable fluency), or that one's self-concept is unaffected by our subjective views of our own levels of performance in deliberate or circumstantially-enforced choice of languages that are not equally familiar. Maybe it is not a matter of different languages imposing different thought patterns on to those who use them, but rather the feeling that one's awareness of the world is enhanced and altered through thoughtful and creative use of language, and that the acquisition of a second or subsequent language must, in itself, be enriching, but must also allow levels of understanding and connections to be attained that are unlikely to have arisen as the result only of prolonged use of the mother tongue.

Some interviewees felt that there was something to be said for the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis, and that the implications of it were nothing more than common sense:

> I've always been fascinated by this business of national mentality. People try to dismiss this as a load of nonsense or...but we all do think differently regardless... obviously there's common ground....and there is, through reasons of history and geography, a great deal of national mentality, and I find this interesting - why does a Chinese person think this is like this? We have a man to man talk (which is rather sexist), while the Germans have their talk *unter vier Augen*. (4)

For others, however, not merely the metaphor but the entire context of the use of a given language was relevant to any subjective evaluation of the communicative process; what matters is not only the language itself, but also the social context in which it is being used, and the identity and role of the interlocutors in relation to the student:

> I do feel different when I'm speaking in German, and I think it goes back to my school days when I was 15..... I had to develop a thick skin, and I had to... in order to survive and enjoy myself I had to really leave my English reserve behind and become an extrovert, and totally tolerant of anybody who tried to take the mickey and make

> me feel embarrassed. This carried on as an adult.... I have taken this rather more assertive... I wouldn't say aggressive, so much, but assertive approach over into my dealings with German people because I feel that is how I get on better with people there, how I communicate best. (17)

In bilingual families, interesting contexts can emerge, which have to do with the affective relationship with the languages - they are, therefore, subjective. This subjective reaction might take the form of an aesthetic response to the qualities of the words. It is possible not to feel the same about the terms *eine Schwalbe* as about *una golondrina* or *une hirondelle*. This is not to say that they convey a different image - the reaction is purely an affective response to the word.. As language does not 'contain' meaning, but simply helps the understander to produce it, it therefore becomes possible to have an affective relationship with the language, which can be far greater than would seem to be warranted by the communicative content itself. Equally, however, the response to given words, sounds, and languages are frequently dependent upon their identification with an emotional context. The observation that follows, about Italian being a suitable language for expressing tenderness and affection, is a case in point. Any language will help an understander to understand, but once there is a choice there could well be a favourite. - The female partner in a bilingual family, born in Italy, talks of her own feelings:

> I do feel different when I switch from English to Italian. I speak Italian with my children, and English with other members of the family or to people outside the family. I think sometimes it's not so much that my feelings change when I switch from one language to another, as that I switch language according to my feelings. I find that when I'm talking to babies or little children I just spontaneously lapse into Italian - it just seems natural to use the language to express tenderness, affection; whereas I find that I tend to slip into English , especially with the children, if I'm angry with them....(16)

The same interviewee describes her husband's use of language in a similar way, suggesting that he, too, finds English, which is his mother tongue, a more repressive medium than Italian:

> When my husband switches from English to Italian he does seem to almost change personality... he seems to become more extrovert, and more excitable, whereas when he's speaking English he has more of a stiff upper lip and seems to be a bit more reserved. (16)

For someone at ease within her own culture, the transition to another can be threatening rather than liberating, and require modifications in non-linguistic behaviour as a result. Compared with this, the use of the English mother tongue can be free from stress if the circumstances of its use is free from stress. This is a sociological rather than a linguistic manifestation :

> When I'm in England, I tend to have a more laid-back, casual approach, which is the best way I find I can communicate with people and staff, colleagues, and all my family. I find if we're on a more casual footing we all get on well, and that is quite important to me, to get on well with people, to strike up an affinity with my friends, family, wherever I am. So I do feel my personality changes a bit when I go to Germany - my approach is brisker, I'm more positive and assertive - I suppose that's really in order to survive. (17)

Traditionally, the acquisition of a second language was long seen as an educational topic, and second-language learning as just another area of the academic curriculum. Gardner (1979) opposed this, observing that the general curriculum is quite naturally embedded within the student's own culture, while in the acquisition of a second language the student is not merely faced with the task of learning new information, but in addition s/he comes up against the need to acquire symbolic elements of a different community whose linguistic and cultural elements are also different. The student is not being asked to learn about the linguistic elements of the new code, but rather to

acquire them, and to make them part of his/her own language experience. This involves making room in one's own system of beliefs about the world, and in one's system of symbols to express those beliefs, for elements of another culture. The consequence is that

> ... the student's harmony with his own cultural community and his willingness or ability to identify with other cultural communities become important considerations in the process of second language acquisition. (Gardner, 1979, 193)

In other words, the successful student will be able to identify to some degree with the cultural elements involved in the study of another language, and the greater the level of this involvement, the more successful the student is likely to be in identifying with the given language. This would clearly appear to suggest that the assumptions, common in English secondary schools, that French or Spanish are somehow more suitable for a given class because they are more or less challenging in the early stages of study, are ignoring any predisposition that the individual student might have towards (or against) one language in particular:

> Even if you see language learning as acting out a part for a while, that part, though different, still has to feel right. The same is true of people and music - not everyone can or should play the piano. We accept readily that a brilliant guitarist may have no skill on the trumpet - they require different personalities. Also in sport, there are huge variations of interest and expertise. (19)

This is an important dialectical point, echoing an observation of Polanyi's with reference to the conscious process of learning with which we are involved as adults, always in a context within which our ability to express what we see is constrained by the language or languages that we have at our disposal. This is not to claim that language *per se* structures our world view, merely our ability to express it:

> ...when we learn to use a language, or a probe, or a tool, and thus make ourselves aware of these things as we are of our body, we interiorise these things and make ourselves dwell in them. Such extensions of ourselves develop new faculties in us; our whole education operates in this way; as each of us interiorises our cultural heritage, he grows into a person seeing the world and experiencing life in terms of this outlook.
> Interiorisation bestows meaning, alienation strips of meaning; when the two are applied alternately, they can jointly develop meaning..... (Polanyi 1969,195).

It is fundamental to this thesis that the alternate processes of interiorisation and alienation serve also to enrich and develop notions of the self as in/competent within the contexts of language learning and language use. We have seen how students have reacted at different stages to the subjective elements involved in the language learning process, and we have seen also how they have tried to articulate these experiences. The whole notion of self is a relatively modern concept. People tend to see their own subjective identities as somehow standing outside and prior to society, possibly because notions of self predate notions of society within the individual. But social subjects are composite personalities, 'dispersed' as Foucault has put it, among the various subject positions. An adult defines himself largely by his experience, and has a deep emotional investment in its value. As every individual's experience is unique, the formulation of this experience and its expression through language enable us to define who we are and establish not only an external persona to present to the rest of the world, but also an internal appreciation of who and what we are. We become what we have done, and also what we continue to do. Our identity is an open-ended construct, though we frequently find ourselves acting as if it were not and as though it needed protecting instead of developing. As has been made clear by the interviews, the study of a second language involves taking a step automatically in the direction of identification of the self with what is other than the self, which implies an altered identity and an altered view of that identity. However, an awareness of difference implies an awareness, not of separate entities, but of the relationships between the parts of a complex whole:

> My time in Spanish-speaking countries has not involved buying a house, or getting married, but has been more focused on myself than on people that I may be responsible for... so that is quite a liberating thing, and I'm able to be in touch with myself and be more aware of myself... I feel I am a freer person, I suppose my children would describe it as "chilling out", but I think for me it's completely the opposite - I actually seem to warm up, whether it's the climate, the surroundings or the people, they bring out some sort of warmth of spirit which maybe is not so apparent in England. (19)

The notion of the self is a complex one. We can identify many aspects of it which are affected in the process of learning another language as an adult, although the fact that we can postulate a number of levels of 'self' does not suggest that they are autonomous or even clearly demarcated. They are all humming along together, sometimes in harmony, sometimes not. In all the cases that follow, the adaptive change from first to second language operates at the level of a public self which is on display. The private self, where we are consciously aware of our own feelings of inadequacy and threat, is the second level in this scheme of things. It follows on from this that whatever the initial motivation for studying a second language may have been, the process becomes one in which the adaptive behaviour manifest in the use of the second language simultaneously reinforces and risks undermining the private, vulnerable self. The value at this time of the existence of a supportive group identity is self-evident, as is the likelihood of unsuccessful second-language performance leading to a loss of confidence and a possible abandoning of the learning task, but it may also be that the whole business of 'taking on a second identity' that has been variously reported is the response of a self, privately vulnerable to mother-tongue-speaking forces, that finds expression in a forum where the collective identity offers support during the trauma of second-language learning and where some of the threatening realities of mother-tongue use are temporarily suspended.

The group, in other words, makes it possible for the learner to give up - partially - one's separateness of identity, to use Guiora's term, in that while my expressible

identity may normally find expression through the medium of my mother tongue, and while by choosing to express it that way I seek and normally find a common badge of identity with other English speakers, when I decide on using another language I abandon such aspects of my identity that are caught up in my mother tongue, and underline my separateness by studying yet another language that the majority of mankind do not know. In the process I join a cultural sub-group, which has a collective identity of its own - Japanese for Beginners, for instance, or the Wednesday Spanish group (see Chapter 5). It is the support of the learning group, as we have seen, that makes possible the achievement and development of the individual. The self as perceiver of the outside world, and of internal thoughts and feelings, is involved from the very beginning in the perception and recognition of the world as embracing things that are unfamiliar in their structure and organisation:

> Obviously when you go to a different country, different culture, different ways of doing things come across. I would go to a shop in Germany and say "Give me something", and I would go into a shop in France and ask very politely for something, but that doesn't mean that I am actually feeling different when I say it. (18)

The self as "me" - as a discrete being that operates, by means of a number of social or public personae, among but independently of other similar beings - responds to the challenges of second-language use in a different, more emotional way, and allows itself to express thoughts which in the context of mother-tongue use might be impermissible:

> I didn't fully think about what I was saying in English, it just came out in Spanish and I said it.
> Q: *Because it was what was needed to be said in Spanish?*
> A: Yes, exactly.
> Q: *And there were no social restrictions, no 'you shouldn't say this, you mustn't...'...is this where the freedom comes from?*
> A: Yes...maybe that has something to do with how I find it easier to say some things in Spanish than I do in English.

Q: *Than you do - you're in the present tense now, you still have this feeling that...*

A: Yes, I can still say some things in Spanish ....

Q: *More easily than...*

A: Yeah. And I can still say bolder things in Spanish than I can in English. (8)

These "bolder things" appear to find expression in the second language, possibly because the student has acquired that language as an adult and therefore has fewer prohibitions associated with it than with the language patterns we grow used to as children. The use of the second language offers the speaker control over the discourse, rather than being subject to it.:

> I do feel different when I speak in a foreign language, because you can say things that you wouldn't dare say in English, because you'd feel too stupid. I think you feel you can get away with certain things, being a foreigner...um...I don't really know how to explain this, but I also feel a real feeling of satisfaction when I can chat away happily in a foreign language and I think My God, I can do it! (12)

The private self is also intuitively felt to be an enduring object to which things are happening at the moment and which embodies past experiences and future goals and aspirations that help to distinguish 'me', as known only to myself, from others, and this manifestation also finds expression:

> I do feel different, but it is not a sea change. It is just that being in a Spanish-speaking environment brings out certain things that are latent in me, which don't normally surface much in my English persona... I think I feel a warmer person, more tactile, slightly more light-hearted, slightly freer, different but not so fundamentally different ... I just feel that certain aspects of me come more into prominence, but I don't feel that fundamentally I've changed personality. I just think certain things are emphasised.... I'm very

very drawn to Spanish. I feel when I speak it that something else takes over. I feel that it's not so much something new, something that I discover, but something that I recover from myself. It's an emergence of something that is inside me. It's not anything alien or external. I identify with Spanish, I feel at home.... (19)

Then there is that aspect of the self which is bound up with feelings of worth and self-esteem within a social, and in this case, domestic setting:

Q> *Do you feel in any way different when you use a foreign language?*
A> Yes, to a certain degree, I think so... and that's partly because my husband doesn't do it! (Laughter) I'm better at something! He speaks French but not Spanish, and I can go to Spain and feel very superior! I'm able to take charge, and tell him what's going on, and if I don't get all of it... if you're in the middle of a conversation you can get kind of contextual clues, can't you, when you're talking to people or... I do feel that I'm one of the few people of my age, that I know, that is doing what I consider something positive in their life, and I think that's just a nice feeling. (6)

There is a frequent awareness of the stereotypical British reluctance to learn or attempt to use a foreign language, and an unwillingness to be identified as a monolingual Briton:

My parents were posted to Monaco, and I joined the army at 15. I would visit them during leave periods, and I started to learn a bit of French. Everyone around me could speak three or four languages, and it was only ignorant British people who were speaking only English all the time. (4)

I really enjoy it... I just think it's very practical, it's very useful in that when you meet different people it makes you look as if you are

> making an effort, and you're not one of these English people who haven't got... sort of, think everyone should speak English. It does give me a bit of self-respect... I can just have a total conversation with somebody, which I did do on my year out... and I think everybody did respect me more for making the effort. (22)

However, such feelings of worth and the self-confidence which they generate are the mirror-image of an area of distinct vulnerability in which one can feel threatened or humiliated, and which one tries to protect and fortify:

> If we have only a limited knowledge of the language, then I believe that speaking the language can have a negative effect upon the image of ourselves which we project when speaking in the foreign language.... we may become, for example, inhibited, shy, reserved, withdrawn, nervous, anxious, and so *if* we aren't confident then the effect it can have upon us, I feel, can be to limit us, make us less expressive, more inhibited, and I think that all this is part of the fact that language is so much a part of us, so much a part of our own identity, so much a part of where we come from, that people who live abroad, and who are not able to use their mother tongue on a daily basis must be living almost... part of them must, in a sense, not be living... part of them must be kept almost locked away within them... the person which goes around living daily life must in a way be almost a different person.... I suppose *this is why totalitarian* regimes have tended to focus on language as something to eliminate in minority groups, because it is so much synonymous with identity. (15)

None of which suggests that language can not have a strictly utilitarian function as well, in which aspects of identity are irrelevant, or felt to be so. Several interviewees reported no such apparent change. Perhaps unfortunately, the process of teaching a language is not necessarily one in which the teacher feels free to reveal multiple facets of identity:

> I have no experience of this at all. I work with a group of teachers who all speak other languages, and they don't seem to change as they change their language... (24)

Similarly, the process of simultaneous translation is not one in which - in my experience at least - the translator is aware of any shift in feeling, any subtleties of identity alteration or expansion when moving from one language to the other. Although simultaneous translation is a very interesting example of what we might term preconscious thought, in that choices of word and syntax are made without conscious screening of possibilities, language when it is operating at this high level of expertise has, paradoxically, a great deal in common with language use in the early stages of study, namely, that it is not being used for revelation or concealment of the self, by the self, but rather for the transmission of ideas that have a source other than the self. It is thus divorced from such language use as has been studied here, in which questions of the involvement of the self are of vital importance. Moreover, the process of simultaneous translation engages both the linguistic selves at the same time. In this context it is not a case of one language being used in preference to another, but rather of operating in both languages and in a complementary fashion.

The question of dreams that occur in another language is a different manifestation of the degree to which increasing expertise in another language allows for automatic (i.e., preconscious) use of that language:

> I occasionally find myself sitting in the bathroom or lying in bed thinking in German... I dream in German, and two or three years ago I was dreaming in German or Thai all the time, and I will now be dreaming in German for the next few days, having just been to Holland and been speaking German with German nationals and Dutch people...
>
> Q> *Do you like that sensation that you can dream in other languages, that there's some part of your mind that can launch off into German or Thai or whatever, without your control?*

A> I suppose I do, but I don't really think about it... it just happens.
(4)

Once again, however pertinent the content of the dream to the reality of the dreamer, the use of the given language as a vehicle for dream is a strictly utilitarian function. It is only afterwards, when the dreamer wakes up, that there is that shock of recognition that the dream has been performed in a language other than the dreamer's mother tongue.

The student who has reached the stage of dreaming in another language has already travelled a long way from the earliest beginnings of *Je m'appelle Jean*. This project has attempted to study aspects of the journey, and the markers through which the different parts of that journey can be identified. The picture that has emerged is one of shifting boundaries, in which the demands placed upon the adult learner vary in nature and intensity. The beginner, frequently struggling to accept that the link between an object and its name is the product of human compromise rather than of natural law, and that in consequence the universe can be renamed, is coming to terms with a learning environment in which making mistakes is inevitable, and necessary, and public. The advanced student often reports not only increased linguistic facility but also, and crucially, a sense of achievement which is rewarding not least because of the levels of liberation and empowerment which accompany it. Between the two, the groups of intermediate students tend to manifest the greatest disparity in the level of learning of the group members, and identify themselves as intermediate largely because they know too much to be classed as beginners and not enough to enjoy or profit from more advanced classes.

Throughout the entire process, the adult studying a foreign language is learning to do things differently. There are new names to be learned, new sounds to be produced by making unfamiliar movements with tongue, throat and palate. There are new grammatical structures and physical gestures to be interpreted, new cultures and literatures to explore in the light of newly-acquired knowledge. In the early stages of the process, the learner typically reports feelings of disempowerment, bewilderment and frustration. Many students find it too much, and abandon the course. For those

who persevere, however, the experience becomes a rewarding one, leading to eventual feelings of empowerment and enriched freedom. The pedagogical implications of the process which begins with people dreaming *of* another language, and which can allow them at some point to dream *in* another language, form the subject of the final chapter.

CHAPTER 10

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH.

In Chapter 5, I discussed some of the steps which can help any student to learn within the context of the study group, namely the value of introducing pairs work as soon as possible, keeping pairs work in a meaningful context, moving from pairs to small groups, using the members of those groups to form new pairs, allowing established pairs to reform, and ensuring that the spirit in which work is undertaken is an uncompetitive one. The role of the tutor in all this is to allow maximum exploration of the language within the restrictions of the given task, and to encourage everyone to see mistakes as a necessary component of valuable practice, rather than as error.

To this list we should now add a focus on the creation and establishment, from the earliest stages of a course, of those cognitive procedures that are characteristic of the language under study. These will naturally vary from one language to the next. Despite the similarities between nineteenth-century texts that were intended for students of German and of French that has been pointed out above, German possesses an orthography which is highly phonetic. So too does Spanish. This fact allows students to learn within a comparatively short time how to apply the rules of spelling and relate them to the sound that the words have when pronounced. French, just like English, is far more complex from this point of view, and requires a longer period of constant practice before the eye and the ear can agree on the correct correlation of the sound and the written word which represents it. Rendall reminds us of the fundamental importance of this correlation:

> Two most important skills are the 'seeing ear' and the 'listening eye' . The 'seeing ear ' is literate: it can pick up incoming sound and translate it in the brain to words and so to meaning. It is capable of 'seeing' the individual words within phrases and sentences. It can take a concatenation of sound and break it down into the constituent elements of what is being said. The 'listening eye' can do more than just recognise written words. It can 'hear' them sounded out

> internally. It can translate the original orthography back into the original sound. It can do more. Using this ability, it can read aloud internally - silently to itself - a whole phrase or sentence and check its correctness against stored patterns built up during the experience of learning. (Rendall, 1998, 3)

This is the end towards which we aspire. This harmony can not be achieved equally at every stage in the learning process, and the general rule of presenting the target language in the form of speech before writing, while it still holds good for adult learners, is complicated in that speech is the most ephemeral form of language, and the one which is hardest not only to retain but also to reproduce:

> Sometimes I find the inability to understand the spoken language is frustrating, irritating, because I know far more Spanish than is evident from what I can hear. If it was all written down I could probably manage... (2)

The advantage of writing is that it holds ideas still on the page. This has led to the feeling, prevalent in some academic circles, that written language is in some way of a higher order than speech, and this feeling can compound the learner's reluctance to use the target language orally. Equally, for some members of learning groups, the notion of writing can also be bound up with the threat of evaluation and assessment:

> My days for exams are over. That would worry me terribly. In any case I hate writing, English or Spanish. (9)

However, language is most completely expressed in speech, since writing does not represent the normal patterns of spoken rhythm, intonation or stress. Moreover, adult learners who have a lifetime history of expecting their written language to correlate to the English sound patterns will feel, if they are encouraged to learn the written forms prematurely, that speech in the target language is a distortion of what they imagined the pronunciation to be. Hearing the language properly used from the earliest stages of a course is thus of immense importance. It is noticeable that for a large number of

the respondents, listening for gist understanding was the language skill they found easiest, and speaking the most difficult. An explanation need not be hard to find, as it has become the case in our century that we have turned into passive receptors of language as it is used in the dissemination of news and information, rather than simultaneously active in its discussion and interpretation. With the advent of the radio it became possible for people to receive in silence the type and quantity of information which in earlier ages would have been conveyed in an atmosphere of interaction. This has become still more the case in the televisual age in which the flow of information is one-way, and which allows that flow to continue in the complete absence of any response, oral or otherwise, from the viewer. There are now clear areas in our lives in which we receive spoken information from non-human sources, making two-way communication impossible, and to which we appear happy to dedicate a significant proportion of our time. Hence, in part, the desperation with which modern language courses attempt to include interactivity as one of the principal features.

So, speech should be presented first. However, adult learners have in practical terms a shorter memory span in a foreign language than they have in their own. Examples or models may be misheard or remembered inaccurately. They may even be forgotten in seconds, and if they are forgotten they cannot be used by the student to understand the grammar or to build other structures by analogy. Repeated exposure to good model patterns of speech is essential if the students are to master key aspects of structure and pronunciation. Merely listening to good models does not in itself produce good pronunciation after childhood - this is one of the things that changes when the lateralization switch is thrown. The adult learner needs to be able to repeat both sound and structure, and massive amounts of practice are required, so much so that some authorities suggest that the students should be engaged in guided practice most of the learning time. Fries (1945) recommended devoting 85% of time to practice, and no more than 15% to explanation and commentary. The value of intensive courses such as that of Giudice, mentioned above, lay not in the sentiments expressed but in the emphasis on the use of patterns to be practised, rather than vocabulary to be learned.

This is significant as it is not uncommon for adult learners to feel that one of their primary tasks is that of learning of vocabulary, which may be true, and that this will equate with mastery of the language. This is anything but the case:

> There's a lot to take in all at once, and not only 2 hours a week. Whenever you feel like it or whenever you can make the time available. The only thing I can take in is vocabulary, I find that really easy, but I find everything else hard... the verbs and the tenses. If you learn anything different, such as, *well, that word doesn't do* that in this situation, I just don't seem to be able to remember that again. (27)

Knowing words, sentences, and rules of grammar is not the same as knowing the language, and the challenge here is to find to what extent language points can be isolated from one another without destroying the co-ordination of the system and the perception of what Corder (1974) called the 'systemic interconnectedness' of language. The essential part of a language for use is the system of basic patterns and significant sound contrasts and sequences. The memory limitations of adult learners, both as adults and as aspiring users of a second language, underline the need for this approach:

> I'm enjoying the classes very much, it's the memory when I get out of the class that seems to be...less good. I think I need more practice, especially at speaking and listening. (34)

Memorising dialogues in the target language gives the student a series of viable models and allows further learning to proceed. Once such patterns have been absorbed, then the process can begin of modifying the building-blocks of language at will, so as to produce subtly different sentences. Language games can be of enormous value in this, allowing the learners autonomy of expression within a pre-established and therefore relatively unthreatening language context.

Once the linguistic material has become familiar through oral communication, then reading and writing can and should be taught as skills which manipulate the graphic representation of known language structures:

> ....often a word whose written form is unfamiliar will be one that the reader has heard before and knows the meaning of. There is a chance, then, that once the sound-form of an unfamiliar word has been assembled it will be recognised and understood. This mode of word recognition is sometimes referred to as "phonic mediation" because the sound of the word mediates the access to its meaning.(Smyth et al, 1990, 27)

Not all writing systems are equally adequate as invariable symbolic representations of sound, as Rendall reminds us (Rendall, 1998). The implication of this is that teaching graphic symbols, and the association of these symbols with the language units they represent, are best seen as separate tasks. It also implies that teaching reading and writing is distinct from teaching speech, and should not be confused with it. This distinction is obvious when the language in question is Greek, for instance, or Japanese. However, the distinction is still important in teaching French, German, Italian etc., when the first language is English, even though the alphabet is apparently the same. Indeed, because it is apparently the same, we have the problem of interference mentioned above in which correct speech can be interpreted as a distortion of previously imagined pronunciation. This is particularly so in the case of words which exist in English, and whose exact morphological counterparts happen also to exist, frequently with another meaning, in the target language. The Spanish words *ten*, *once*, *has*, and so on, have completely different meanings and sounds from their visually-identical counterparts in English, yet they bring with them a quick flash of recognition, of admittedly mistaken identity, which is a source of interference. These patterns on the page will eventually need to be relearned in association with their meanings in the target language.

The process of learning a language involves learning new habits of communication, and as habit-forming takes time, this is best done in cumulative steps. Crucial to the

success of this process are those problem areas within the target language which involve an unfamiliar way of thinking - the use of *ser* and *estar*, for example, in Spanish - and that show structural differences between the first language and the second. These require formal presentation, conscious understanding and massive practice. Those structures which operate in the same way in both languages need merely to be presented in meaningful, unambiguous situations.

When we consider the forms that practice should take, it is clear from my research that many older adults leap at any opportunity to do translation work, whether asked to or not, partly because it was what was required of them when they were first learning a second language as children. In the early stages of second-language proficiency the drawback to this lies in the fact that few words are fully equivalent in two languages. Reliance on translation produces characteristic errors of structure as a result of interference, and slows down the communicative process. This is not to suggest that translation into the target language is not a valuable skill, merely that it is a different one, and should be used sparingly.

By definition, translation requires a shift from - presumably - mother-tongue to target language, and therefore presents the message to be conveyed in a form which is certain to facilitate interference, and not certain to encourage the rapid production of target-language patterns. Its usefulness lies as a way of reinforcing or adding to lexical scope, and in offering the opportunity to elicit certain structures. More valuable than translation, at least in the early stages of language-learning, is encouragement in the process of recognising the real equivalence, within a cultural context, of apparently disparate structures.[31]

While it is common to discuss teaching materials and learning activities on the basis of whether or not they are interesting, classes that are the most entertaining are not always the most effective. It is frequently the case that for adult learners the task can be sufficiently rewarding without the need for it to be dressed up as entertainment.

[31] The corollary of this is an awareness of the fact that while "Bonjour, madame" might appear translatable as "Good morning, Madam", the two patterns are not equivalent if we place each of them within its own cultural context.

Learning is the crucial outcome, and the emphasis ought to be on what the students are doing, rather than on what the tutor is up to. Indeed, it is possible to plan occasions on which the tutor should do nothing beyond responding to the students.[32]

Of greater value than the entertainment side of things is immediate and positive recognition of relevance to the students' areas of interest. This is not to advocate grimness in language lessons, for the majority of adult learners feel inhibitions born of insecurity and tend to welcome elements of informality and relaxation. For some people, language is a disabling and threatening aspect of life as we live it, and one in which a lack of expertise can have profound consequences. Those of us who are able to make a living as a result of language skills, whether in teaching, sales, journalism, politics or any other area of activity which rewards accurate and coherent use of language, may find it hard to realise just how daunting slightly unfamiliar language use - and this may involve no more than a shift in register - can prove to be. Indeed, when people feel insecure in their language use, this insecurity is predictably quick to emerge as soon as language turns to metalanguage:

> *Q> What makes the other people so good?*
> A> I'm not quite sure what makes them good, but they seem to know when something different has occurred, or when something has been put into a tense that mebbes it shouldn't have, and they seem to know all this and they know why things have changed, and they seem to not ask that question. (27)

[32] The background to an example of this at A-level had been the prior study of two texts concerning kestrels in Spain. Each pair of students had a plastic cup of water, two paper-clips, several sheets of paper, and a second cup containing a kestrel pellet. I then sat down in silence at a central point in the room, and responded only with gestures and smiles to anything said in English. It was not long before the questions began in the target language, ranging immediately from patterns directed at me, such as "What do we do?", and quickly reaching the level of speculative questions asked by one student of another, such as "What do you think will happen if we put it in the water?" and "Do you think that is a bone?" As the students continued to explore the contents of the pellets, the type of question began to change, and I was asked how we could identify the bones, where I had found the pellets, why kestrels produce them, what other birds do likewise and so on. Even those who had found the material distasteful at first were soon engrossed in the activity, and the need to ask questions became a natural one. Dictionaries were used as the need naturally arose, and the activity allowed a group of adults to explore an aspect of the world through language, much as a child habitually does.

For those who do feel vulnerable when asked to perform speech in public, the need to present written material for assessment is understandably seen to be threatening. The adults interviewed in this survey expressed themselves with greater unanimity on this subject than on any other. Indeed, the perceived threat of formal assessment at any stage of the course remains a major cause of adult drop-out, especially in the early stages and most particularly at beginners' level:

> I hate exams. They make me want to not learn Spanish any more, because of the fear of failing. If I came out with excellent marks then obviously I'd be glad I'd done them. It makes me want to run away and hide. I probably find that although I hardly ever do homework anyway I'm doing even less because it's a way of shutting it out. It's only since I've been older that I've adopted this attitude, since I came out of the education system. Mind you, I was probably a bit like that at university as well. (12)

In this new millennium, new trends begin to assume greater importance than in the past. It has appeared since the 1997 election as though the term "lifelong learning" may become more than merely an empty phrase, and although the initial aim will doubtless be to encourage adult learners to acquire new skills which are essentially work-related, the concept of education as something rightfully continuing beyond what is merely and exclusively inflicted on the young, is an important and encouraging change. The major changes of all, however, will have to do with the explosion of digital technology which will hugely affect the presentation of learning materials for the children and the adults of the future. Those who have already become computer-literate as children will have little difficulty in exploiting the opportunities that future technological innovations will present. However, in the short term we face a generation of adult learners, not all of whom are computer-literate or would wish to be.

There is the certainty of vast change in methods of delivery in the future, with adult students and others being expected increasingly to rely on information technology as the vehicle for language instruction. Older adults are subject to healthy (i.e. non-

pathological) degeneration of visual, aural and sometimes mental acuity which affects the ease and speed not only of their learning but also their engagement with and ability to make profitable use of presented text. In the context of the next generation of language-learning programmes, with particular reference to materials accessed on the Internet or via any interactive system, questions of colour of images, size and styles of font, resolution of digitalised images and sound quality will become ever more important. (Watts, 1997).

For those adults who are blessed with computer-literacy and with the wealth and time needed to make use of this skill, both the CD-ROM and, in the immediate future, the Internet, offer unparalleled opportunities for extensive and guided practice. Adult learners are generally aware of the need for such practice:

> there are stages of development and in order to get beyond this basic stage you've got to have greater facility with the words and idiomatic expressions and that sort of thing, which only comes about with practice. Lack of repetitive use means you tend to revert to basic vocabulary most of the time. (2)

However, the existence of new forms of delivery such as the CD-ROM and Internet has disadvantages as well, not least of which is the problem of the learning group no longer necessarily having a physical presence in a common time and space. This is important because linguistic discourse is essentially part of social process - it does not only mirror or map an independent reality but is a functioning element in social process itself.

The twin concerns of what is presented to the student as text, and how is that text to be exploited, have already undergone review and will continue to do so. This project has attempted to shed some light on other aspects of the equation; particularly the functional prowess of the language student outside the language-learning arena, rooted as that necessarily is in considerations of past schooling, as well as past and present linguistic interaction within the social parameters that provide both structure and constraint to each individual life. In addition, there is the fundamentally important

matter of the interaction between a given student and other members of the learning microcosm.

The implications of the past language experience of the individual learner

We are now in a position to consider the stepping-stones that have presented themselves through the interviews as factors in the formation and conservation of self-image among the adult learners of a second language. We can not understand the adult without some awareness of those variables that affected the child, and fundamental to the adult's performance as a student of language is the social history of that adult as a child. By social history I mean the class history and the nature of the up-bringing, with all that that was likely to imply for family and class values in terms of education, and the educational aspirations and expectations that surrounded the child. These expectations and aspirations were, as is the case with children, not of their choosing. They were contextual, and rooted in the views of others - both at home and at school - as to what the child was likely to achieve.

Out of the combination of these two sets of expectations there developed for each person an educational history, in which the educational system responded to the individual in the early years, and to which a third strand of expectation was also interwoven - the reaction of other members of the cohort to the educational experience. The attitudes to education that were held by the microsocieties of the family, the school, and the peer group, all had their varying degrees of influence upon the young learner. These attitudes found their expression - whether overtly or covertly - through language. In addition, language was the medium through which much educational information was initially transmitted, absorbed or possibly misunderstood, and eventually exhibited and assessed. However, just as with educational attitudes, the frequency and nature of language use within the family, the school, and the peer-group, was immensely variable. The child who from an early age was spoken to and listened to at home, at school, and within the peer-group, and the child whose language exchanges were limited to criticism and repression, could be expected to take very different views of how language worked for them, and of what its true function was. While it may be true, as Pinker observes, that

> In general, language acquisition is a stubbornly robust process; from what we can tell there is virtually no way to prevent it from happening short of raising a child in a barrel. (Pinker, 1984, 87.)

it by no means follows that the individual experience of that process is universally the same. Most of us are raised in a barrel of one kind or another, whether genetic, or social, or arising out of our own personalities. While the barrel does not prevent us from acquiring language at all, it is influential in determining the nature of that language, and of our individual relationship to it.

Out of the possible combinations of these variables there emerges a linguistic profile of each individual child, a profile which reveals and quantifies familiarity with language *per se* as a means of successful communication; sensitivity to the varieties and implications of register; and overall versatility in the use of language-related options such as humour or a strict appeal to logic. These observations apply necessarily to the child's native tongue, and suggest that a relationship between the individual and the language is established at an early stage in our lives, well before we begin to resemble adults. Like so many of the strengths and weaknesses that we later exhibit as adults, our relationship with our own language evolves early, and has profound implications for aspects of our later lives. Not least among these implications is the view that we develop of ourselves as users - successful or otherwise - of language. This view of ourselves is, yet again, influenced by such views of our own proficiency as may be expressed by others. Out of this arises the importance for the tutor of challenging negative or tentative self-views - the claim that "I can't even speak English properly", or the very different but equally negative claim that " I don't even know how English works" - which are used by some adult students as a pretext and preparation for not succeeding in the study of a second language. Bruner has emphasised how the self arises from interpersonal reactions in a culture under the influence of narratives (Bruner, 1990), and in the circumstances of a second-language class that self is under constant scrutiny and possible attack.

The fear of error is a constant in the second-language learning process. How intense that fear is will vary from person to person and from skill to skill. The majority of interviewees found the least threatening skill to be that of reading in the target language. The ideas are held still on the page, and there is time to re-read and reflect on the text. Even so, what for the beginner is a challenge involving unfamiliar structure, remains difficult for the more advanced student who is grappling with a far greater lexicon:

> I find even at ordinary reading speed I can sometimes get the gist of stories, but there were one or two I hadn't a clue what they were about. Even reading at home, there is an enormous amount of vocabulary I didn't know. Also the word order is not the same, so you're trying to unravel that and while you're trying to do that the reading is going on.(2)

As in reading, so too in writing, there is a sense in which the student has some control over the activity, or at least over the amount of the time that is given to the activity. Writing is felt to be a difficult exercise, and in some way less enjoyable than reading - there will ultimately be a permanent record of the process, available for scrutiny and criticism. Nevertheless, the overall feeling was that while these receptive uses of language were unquestionably difficult, they were less threatening than attempting to do in our second language what we do most of in our first - speaking and listening. In these skill areas there are considerable periods of frustration since the command of language is not a matter of theoretical knowledge, but rather of practice. This becomes painfully clear not least in the apparent speed of native speech as compared with the painful slowness of the beginner who is struggling to find a form of self-expression:

> When I start a foreign language from scratch I feel really stupid, because you just get to learn just how much you don't know. You are aware of how much you don't know, and you keep getting things wrong, and nothing makes sense and you find it really hard at first, and so you just feel stupid that you can't do it. These feelings

> alternate with time, I would think. Sometimes I go through my Spanish and I can translate things straight away into my head, without looking any words up, and it makes me feel really good, or I'll read books - I'll read the *España Viva* book, where they tell you to join in a conversation with a Spanish person and I can get the other part correct, and that makes me feel good. And then other times I'll go and do Spanish and I can't get the tense right or I can't get some of the words right, I just forget the basics, things I learnt a long time back, and I just get so annoyed that I just can't do it, and it just seems like it's never going to come to me... so then you feel back to being stupid again, and that you won't learn the language.... (27)

For those adult learners who are used to interpreting and expressing the world through their native language alone, part of the reason for the insecurity that they report when trying to express themselves in the target language is felt to be a loss of power over the surrounding world, in which familiar objects suddenly have no known name, and are thus not controllable through language. In our second language we not only find that familiar names have disappeared. What is far worse is the fact that they have been replaced and subverted by what are non-words in terms of our mother tongue. Our memory, in so far as it is reliant on our mother tongue, tends to reject these. Thus whatever the degree of limitation that may or may not exist in the native language, the speaker necessarily has limited power over the world when using the new target language, but it is *differently* limited. For some, this limitation is an echo, albeit magnified, of what happens in the mother tongue - for others, it does not reflect the experience of mother-tongue language use. In all cases it is a disconcerting experience, and calls for courage to overcome.

The most important factor which determines the level of ease or otherwise of learning structural patterns in a new language is their similarity to or difference from the patterns in the native language. For those patterns that are functionally parallel to the native language, little work needs to be done and little explanation, if any, is needed. New patterns and, particularly, new pronunciation habits need to be learned with a

high degree of automaticity with attention on the message, on communication, and not on the sounds themselves. This is not easily achieved, as transfer of mother-tongue sound and structure can interfere initially. Moreover, as coming to terms with these differences is an inescapable part of the language-learning process, an awareness of context and register becomes of great importance in deciding just what aspects of authentic language use should be studied, authentic language being the most complete index to the culture in which it is used. This is no less true of modern French than it is of the Dyirbal-speakers of Queensland.

The implications of the group experience for facilitating or inhibiting the learning of a second language

The composition of a learning group varies enormously from one age-group to the next. During early school years, students are grouped together in cohorts of a similar age, and in the majority of cases the life-experience of one student from within a school's catchment area can be expected to have a number of features in common with the life-experience of another. The broader catchment area of many secondary schools implies a greater variety of social background among its inmates, while direct experience of bereavement, divorce and other forms of adult trauma which nevertheless afflict the young, and of the success/failure continuum wherever we believe it to exist, will also vary. Within our universities as well, undergraduates are frequently more or less of an age, though of diverse social backgrounds, and have at least sufficient interests and behaviour patterns in common to have spawned an easily-recognisable stereotype.

This study has addressed the situation of adult learners in a particular Further Education setting, where the composition of a language-learning group - to a greater extent than any of the above - is a highly mutable and kaleidoscopic thing. The group comes together tentatively at first, and forms in the process a very temporary sub-set of society. It is temporary in a dual sense: first, as it is normally called into weekly existence for no more than two or three hours; and second, as its members know and accept that it will, as currently constituted, have a life-expectancy of a year or two at the outside.

It is a peculiarity of circumstances in Durham, moreover, that while not all the interviewees were native speakers of English, they were all of European origin with one exception, that exception being from South America. The variety of racial origins that characterises Further Education classes in other areas of the United Kingdom has not been a factor in the adult language-learning groups under discussion at New College. Clearly, in such colleges as have representatives of different ethnic groups among their adult language-learning students, the pattern becomes more complex still, as this implies a further variable in terms of the early expectations and aspirations of family and class, as well as in the educational system's response to the individual, as represented by the teachers and the other members of the cohort who are caught up in the system.

The presence of non-native speakers of English in such a group is a clear reminder that not all members of any learning group will respond to the same cultural reference framework. Adults who have lived in this country for twenty years may still not respond to references to cultural events, trivial or transcendent, that occurred before their arrival. The same is true of native speakers who have lived elsewhere for protracted periods - the whole framework of cultural reference is the result of continuous accretion, and any gaps in the process potentially lead to areas where the context that permits understanding is threadbare. This is no more than a magnified version of the situation that affects us all as individual adults, each with our own life history, and each with the resulting educational and emotional baggage that we bring with us to the learning group.

There is a very real sense in which the moment of joining a learning group brings into focus the details of that educational and emotional baggage. The adults joining such a group are whatever they have become - *un hombre es, a la larga, sus circunstancias*, as Borges reminded us above - in terms of the relationship that each has formed with mother-tongue. We take our own reality with us wherever we go, in the form of our own language:

> The thought that there are parts of the language I'm missing can induce a small panic in me, as if such gaps were missing parts of the world or my mind - as if the totality of the world and mind were coeval with the totality of language. (Hoffman, 1989, 217)

Each adult student has a greater or lesser familiarity with the language, and a greater or lesser sensitivity to and versatility within its constituent registers. This experience of language will often have been interpreted by the student as something quite different - as somehow indicative of language ability, ranging from the "I can't even speak English properly" to the feeling that "It's so simple in English - why do they have to complicate matters in Spanish?" Our students come together and allow themselves to be infantilised, in order to begin the learning of a different language from its very beginning. In order to practise it at all, the student needs to establish what Lado has termed a linguistic beachhead in this new and unfamiliar area in which everything is strange:

> The beginning student does not hear the target language. He controls none of its grammar, none of its vocabulary. He has no memory in it; as soon as the model stops, he forgets. ....the student must break into the language. He must establish a linguistic beachhead. (Lado, 1964, 61.)

However, as is borne out by the testimony of the learners interviewed, this is not a mere repetition of what they already achieved as children.

> precisely because the task of understanding is the same for the child and the adult, the functional equivalents of the concept develop at a very early stage of childhood. Given this identity in task, this functional equivalence, there is nonetheless a profound difference in the composition, structure and mode of activity of the forms of thinking that function to resolve the task in the child and the adult. (Vygotsky, 1984, 125)

One of the major differences lies in the fact that what to the child was part of a tacit process of discovery, in the adult becomes a task, which is, as we have seen, the object of deliberate and continuous effort. Chomsky had identified as of crucial importance two aspects of the language acquisition process, namely, how the child can possibly discover the highly sophisticated generative grammar of his language:

> It seems plain that language acquisition is based on the child's discovery of what from a formal point of view is a deep and abstract theory - a generative grammar of his language - many of the concepts and principles of which are only remotely related to experience by long and intricate chains of unconscious quasi-inferential steps. (Chomsky,1965, 57-58).

Polanyi addressed the tacit nature of this process, when he observed that

> ...the striving imagination has the power to implement its aim by the subsidiary practice of ingenious rules of which the subject remains focally ignorant. This kind of rule can be acquired tacitly and only tacitly, and it can also be practised only tacitly... (Polanyi, 1969, 200)

Nevertheless, in the absence of linguistic and cultural immersion in the target language, as tutors we continue to encourage our students in the practice of ingenious rules, of which we expect and encourage them to remain focally aware. Learning a second language outside the cultural context in which the student can become immersed in the language itself and the realities that it expresses, because of the cognitive discoveries that are made there about those aspects of the world in the target language, requires a degree of conscious application to the rules governing its formation and use. It is only when the rules are applied tacitly, in other words automatically, with no internal dialogue along the lines of "Now, what was the order of the adverbs?" or "Which object pronoun comes first?" that we can begin to understand the system operating behind Chomsky's second concern:

> ...the fundamental fact about the normal use of language, namely the speaker's ability to produce and understand instantly new sentences that are not similar to those previously heard in any physically-defined sense...nor obtainable from them by any sort of 'generalisation' known to psychology or philosophy. (Chomsky 1965, 58).

Again, Polanyi casts a helpful light on this question when he observes that

> in riding a bicycle we do something quite similar. We keep our balance at each moment by solving, in effect, the equilibrium equation for ever new sets of values taken on by its variables. (Polanyi 1969, 195-6).

Successful use of spoken language, just like successful riding of a bicycle, is an individual achievement. It normally is achieved and assessed in a public forum, which is at its smallest the language-learning group. In a Further Education context, student diversity of prior achievement is the norm to be expected, and the members of the learning group will all have been subject, to different degrees and sometimes for a very long time, to the variables discussed above, which are variously conducive to learning success and to learning failure. Naturally enough, there are some students whose educational history has left them with an image of themselves as confident, competent users of language, and whose general overall level of education has led to their awareness of themselves and others at a social and cultural level. Such students will be better prepared to enjoy and profit from a course in another language, than other students whose self-image is uncertain and haunted by fears of appearing stupid when, as inevitably happens, the perceived difficulty of this new language makes itself apparent for the first time. It is at such moments that the nature of the learning group becomes of paramount importance in the individual's struggle to learn.

Within the learning group, once it has begun to form its own identifiable character, interlanguage - at the individual level - as well as shared discoveries and fantasies abound, not least concerning the ways in which the target language works. Future

acculturation within the group involves not the Piagetian focus of cognitive development as a sequence of emerging logical competencies, but rather is a result of pragmatic, intersubjective agreements-in-meaning which lie at the heart of the developmental process. (Light et al, 1991.) These agreements in meaning are, for the most part, accurate, but they are fundamental to the process of using language communicatively even when, as occasionally happens, they are inaccurate.

Partly because receptive language use is a highly speculative enterprise, confidence is widely seen as being an important factor - the confidence bred of past success:

> Confidence has a lot to do with it - they (i.e. other members of the group) seem able to carry it off. Outgoing personality, a bit of extroversion. Even if they don't get it correct. There is a lot more to being good at foreign languages than just the accuracy. It would be lovely to have it but it doesn't really matter - the point there is to be able to carry on a conversation and get a response, and be able to reply to them. There seems to be something wrong with the way we learn our languages - in other countries they don't seem to write so well but they communicate orally much better than we do. (3)

However, this is not necessarily a question only of behaviour in the second language recapitulating what already exists in the mother tongue. Mention has been made above of people who feel tongue-tied and infantilised in the second language, but also of people who become more animated rather than less so when they express themselves in their second language. Our experience of the social context into which we are born, and of the language which we absorb as a part of that social context, will be slightly different for every one of us. Our mother-tongue skills may or may not be offered the kind of forum in which they can extensively displayed, and postulating two adults of roughly equal mother-tongue skills it may well be that one is seen as confident and capable, while the other is deemed shy and ineffectual because of their social context as much as because of any personal idiosyncrasy. When the social context changes, the retiring student can feel suddenly empowered, not for linguistic reasons alone, but because some earlier constraint no longer applies.

This has distinct implications for the learning environments that we create. Group safety is of paramount importance, if we are to counteract some of the feelings of linguistic dispossession that inevitably accompany our excursions into self-expression through the vehicle of a second language:

> ....it takes all my will to impose any control on the words that emerge from me. I have to form entire sentences before uttering them; otherwise, I too easily get lost in the middle. My speech, I sense, sounds monotonous, deliberate, heavy - an aural mask that doesn't become me or express me at all. (Hoffman, 1989, 118.)

Early use of a second or subsequent language is above all a conscious performance, and if properly structured and maintained the learning group offers a uniquely valuable forum for performance of this kind. Our efforts as tutors must be aimed at engendering feelings of group safety, despite and in large measure because of the perceived difficulty of the task. The public nature of language performance in the group is a potential advantage to the learner, since

> People are not 'natural' characters, they are performers capable of dissembling. The individual is fragmented into a multiple set of possibly discordant identities; insincerity arises from being aware of the requirements of society. (Weatherall and Potter, 1989, 207)

The group is a close community, and can facilitate the release and exploration of aspects of the self that are not normally accessible. The opportunity to express those aspects through the target language is, when taken as a positive thing by all concerned, enough to counteract the anxious moments when what we want to say and what we are able to say are less then identical. Progress in language-learning, as in general understanding, has to do with the re-interpretation of basic ideas, and proceeds at different rates for different persons under seemingly the same conditions. For all of them there is, sooner or later, the moment when they feel

> that touch of anxiety, that worry about embarrassing oneself by either getting it wrong or suddenly not being able to understand... there's also a deal of frustration when you realise that you can't actually say what you want to say. (11)

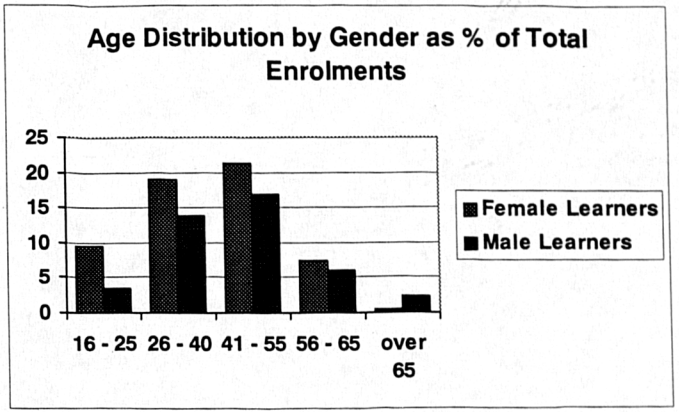
Early stages of language learning involve a succession of such moments. The eventual success or failure of an adult student can be profoundly influenced by what happens on these occasions. The adult is expected in everyday life to be able to apply logic to problems and move towards a solution to them, but the process of learning a language does not necessarily respond to logic alone. Learning to express one's self through another language involves to some degree the reinterpretation of ideas, and this in turn involves the discovery and acceptance of difference.

This research has attempted to shed some light on the ways in which different adults see themselves reacting to the challenges of second-language learning, and to identify in their own words the pitfalls and obstacles they encounter along the way. Our awareness of the various vulnerabilities of the typical adult in a language-learning context can inform our efforts as tutors to increase group safety, reduce drop-out, and make the entire process a more enjoyable - though no less challenging - experience.

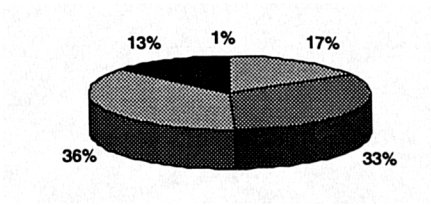
APPENDIX 1. STATISTICAL INFORMATION

What follows is a statistical picture of enrolments for Modern Languages classes at New College Durham.

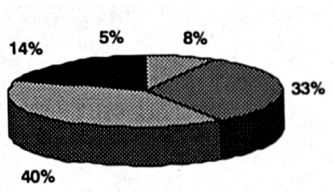
Overall Language Enrolments 1999 - 2000



Females

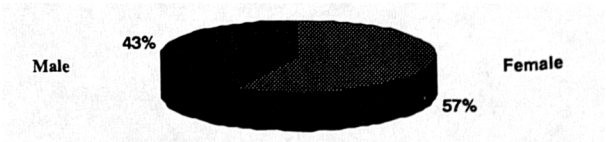


Males

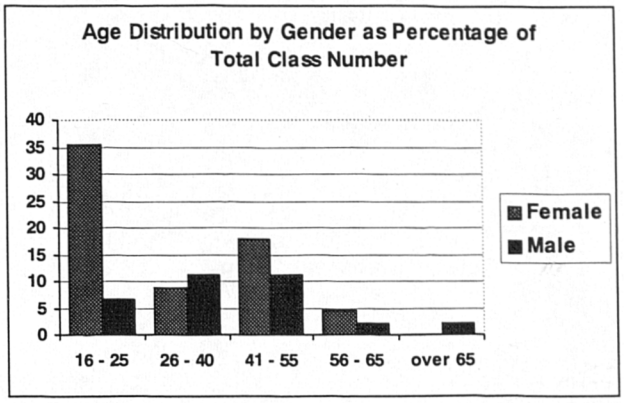


Average age, female learners	**39**
Age range, female learners	**16 - 73**
Average age, male learners	**66**
Age range, male learners	**16 - 84**

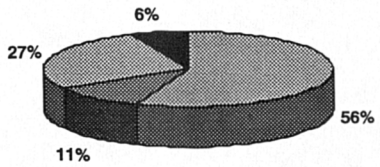
Gender Distribution



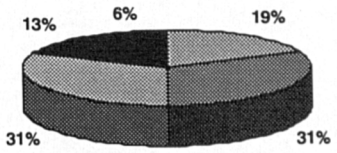
French Language Enrolments 1999 - 2000



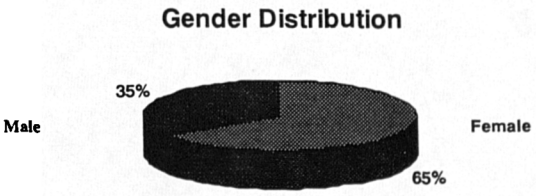
Females



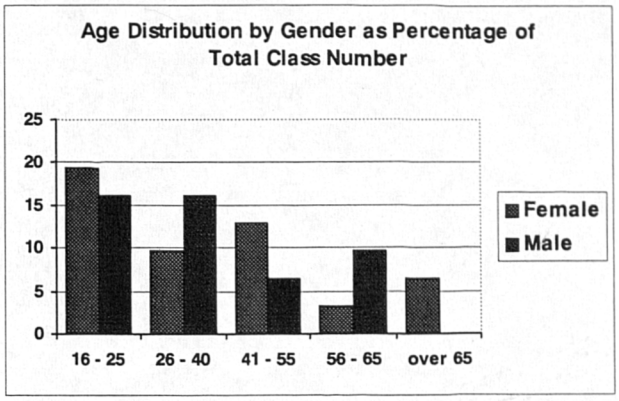
Males



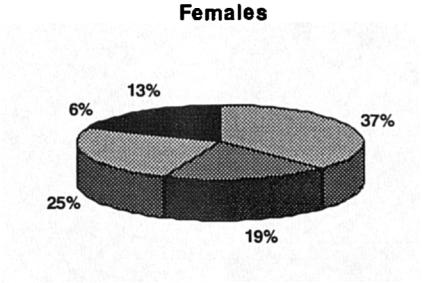
Average age, female learners	**25**
Age range, female learners	**17 - 59**
Average age, male learners	**43**
Age range, male learners	**17 - 67**



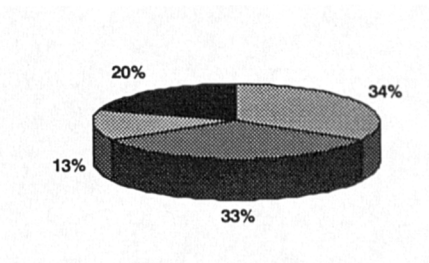
German Language Enrolments 1999 - 2000



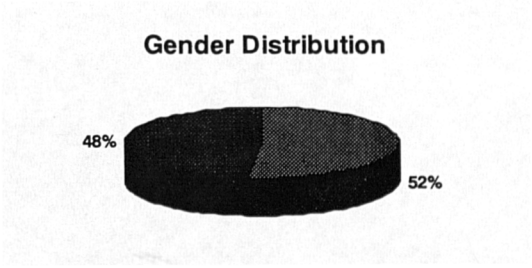
Females



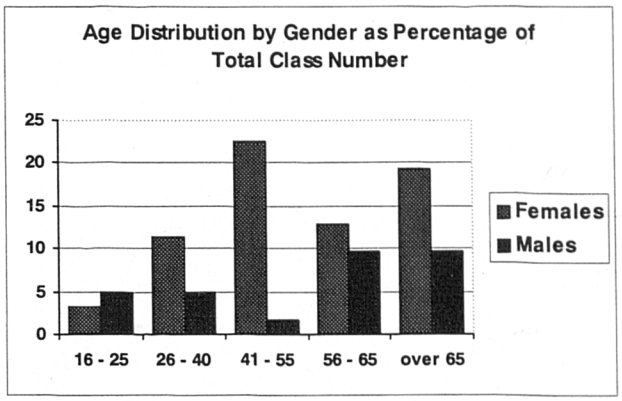
Males



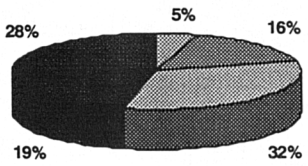
Average age, female learners	**37**
Age range, female learners	**17 - 59**
Average age, male learners	**37**
Age range, male learners	**18 - 64**



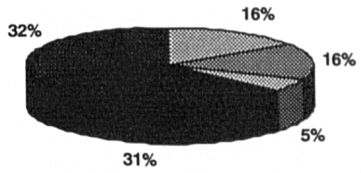
Italian Enrolments 1999 - 2000



Females



Males



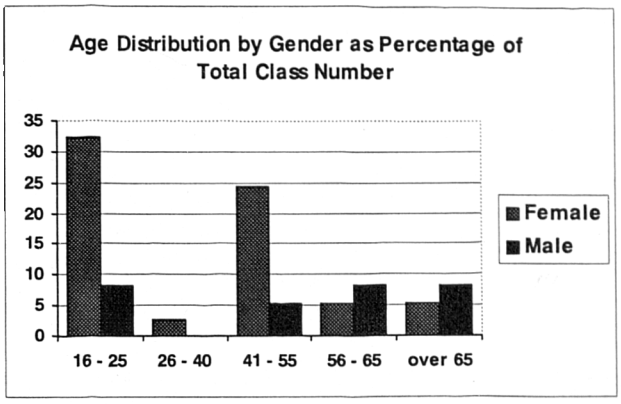
Average age, female learners	**53**
Age range, female learners	**23 - 70**
Average age, male learners	**52**
Age range, male learners	**20 - 74**

Gender Distribution

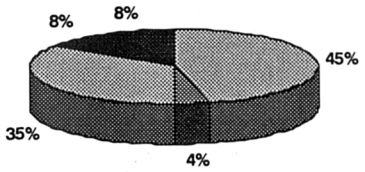
Male

Female

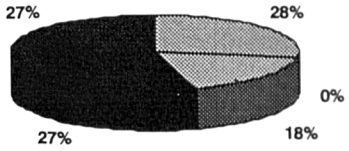
Spanish Enrolments 1999 - 2000



Females



Males



Average age, female learners	**37.1**
Age range, female learners	**17 - 69**
Average age, male learners	**50.18**
Age range, male learners	**17 - 72**

Gender Distribution

APPENDIX 2. THE INTERVIEWEES.

A total of forty adults between the ages of 25 and 69 at the time of the interview, recorded their views on many aspects of language learning and language use. The interviews were carried out following a questionnaire so that the same questions would be asked of all, but the structure was a flexible one and students were encouraged to explore aspects of the process that particularly interested them. Of the interviewees, 15 (37.5%) were men and 25 (62.5%) were women, which is in line with the average statistical composition of adult second-language learners at New College Durham (see Appendix 1). All age-groups were represented. This appendix provides some background information about each of the interviewees quoted during the project.

1. Male, aged 47. Lecturer. Interests include gardening, dressing walking-sticks, music. Enjoyed languages as a child. Describes self and parents as working-class.

2. Male, aged 56. Retired teacher. Interests include reading, and sport. Best at history and geography as a child. Describes self as middle-class, parents as working-class.

3. Female, aged 49. Housewife. Interests include animals, and studying languages. Enjoyed languages as a child. Describes self and parents as lower middle-class.

4. Male, aged 37. Ex-soldier. Interests include languages and martial arts. Best at history and geography as a child. Describes self as working-class, parents as lower middle-class.

5. Female, aged 46. Housewife. Enjoyed languages as a child. Describes self as lower middle-class, parents as working-class.

6. Female, aged 65. Retired nurse. Best at sciences as a child. Interests include walking, gardening and music. Describes self as lower middle-class, parents as working-class.

7. Female, aged 66. Retired PA to consultant paediatrician. Best at English as a child. Interests include flying (obtained pilot's licence aged 50), archaeology, music. Describes self and parents as working-class.

8. Male, aged 25. Office worker. Best at technical drawing as a child. Describes self and parents as middle-class.

9. Female, aged 69. Retired teacher. Had last studied French 49 years before beginning her course as an adult. Best at Latin and maths as a child. Described self and parents as working-class. Died in her early seventies, three years after interview.

10. Female, aged 58. Teacher. Best at English as a child. Interests include travel, reading, walking and music. Describes self as lower middle-class, parents as working-class.

11. Male, aged 30. Teacher. Best at art as a child. Interests include model-making, zoology and travel. Describes self and parents as lower middle-class.

12. Female, aged 29. Personnel officer. Best at English language and literature as a child. Interests include travel and music. Describes self and parents as lower middle-class.

13. Male, aged 56. Chartered engineer. Best at "subjects with a number content" as a child. Has never found languages interesting, and studies because he has a house in Spain. Describes self as lower middle-class, parents as working-class.

14. Female, aged 25. Cashier in a building society. Best at English as a child. Interests include travel and music. Describes self and parents as working-class.

15. Male, aged 32. Teacher. Best at languages and sport as a child. Describes self as lower middle-class, parents as working-class.

16. Female, aged 31. Housewife. Good at languages as a child. Native speaker of Italian. Describes self as lower middle-class, parents as working-class.

17. Female, aged 40. Housewife. Good at languages as a child. Enjoys travel. Describes self and parents as lower middle-class.

18. Female, aged 29. Lecturer. Good at languages, but also at English and maths. Enjoys travel and shopping. Describes self and parents as lower middle-class.

19. Female, aged 42. Lecturer. Best at English language and literature as a child. Interests include travel and music. Describes self and parents as middle-class.

20. Male, aged 51. Employed by training agency. Best at languages as a child, but also art. Interests include travel, music and sketching. Describes self and parents as middle-class.

21. Female, aged 28. Housewife. Claims not to have been "best at anything" at school, but admits to liking art and English. Describes self and parents as working-class.

22. Female, aged 26. Works in Telesales. Best at German and maths as a child. Describes self and parents as upper middle-class.

23. Male, aged 38. Involved in teacher training. Best at English, French, and sprinting as a child. Describes self and parents as middle-class.

24. Female, aged 42. Teacher. Best at English literature and art as a child. Born in Uruguay, where she went to school. Describes self and parents as middle-class.

25. Male, aged 52. Teacher. Native speaker of French. Best at English as a child in France. Describes self and parents as middle-class.

26. Female, aged 56. Teacher. Native speaker of Spanish. Best at literature as a child. Describes self and parents as middle-class.

27. Female, aged 30. Civil engineering technician. Best at maths as a child. Describes self and parents as working-class.

28. Female, aged 63. Retired social worker. Native speaker of German. Describes herself as "classless, although my parents would have said we belonged to the middle class."

29. Female, aged 37. Administrator. Best at history and geography as a child. Enjoys travel, and studying Spanish. Describes self as middle-class, parents as working-class.

30. Female, aged 25. Teacher. Best at languages as a child. Enjoys travel. Describes self and parents as working-class.

31. Female, aged 31. Building society clerk. Best at maths as a child. Enjoys travel. Describes self and parents as working-class.

32. Male, aged 40. Education officer. Native speaker of Spanish. Best at languages as a child. Describes self and parents as middle-class.

33. Male, aged 37. Civil servant. As a child, was best at English, with art a close second. Describes self and parents as working-class.

34. Female, aged 48. Civil servant. As a child, best at English literature and history. Describes self as middle-class, parents as working-class.

35. Male, aged 46. Lecturer. As a child, very good at arithmetic, English, history and French. Describes self as middle-class, parents as working-class.

36. Female, aged 52. Teacher. As a child, was best at singing and acting. Describes self as middle-class, parents as working-class.

37. Female, aged 58. Native speaker of French. As a child, was best at "geography above all - everything, except sciences and maths." Describes self as middle-class, parents as working-class.

38. Female, aged 40. Native speaker of Spanish. Good at English as a child. Describes self and parents as middle-class.

39. Male, aged 38. Mechanic. Quite good at maths as a child. Describes self and parents as working-class.

40. Male, aged 40. Teacher. Best at languages as a child. Describes self as lower middle-class, parents as working-class.

41. Female, aged 19. University undergraduate. Describes self and parents as middle-class.

APPENDIX 3. THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE.

INTERVIEW TAPE NUMBER SIDE

1. Why do you study languages?

Studied at school Like them

Travel Business

Family Personal history

Other

2. Why this particular language?

Studied at school Like it

Travel Business

Family Personal history

Other

3. Do other people in your family speak FLs? Yes No

4. Which generation? Older Same Younger

5. Were you particularly aware of L varieties as a child? Yes No

6. Why do you think this was? .....

.....

.....

7. What sort of reward do you get/expect to get from L study?

Fun Practical

Thrill Self-respect

Do something useful Other

8. Is language study all positive? Yes No

What are the best things about it?

.....

.....

What are the worst?

.....

.....

9. Is it hard work? Yes No
If so, what makes it hard?

Vocabulary Syntax

Anxiety Slows you down
(Suggest these headings if necessary).

10 Do you give more importance to Accuracy or Fluency?
Are you at all anxious about either of them? Yes No

11. What do you do professionally?.....

12. What does your partner do?.....

13. How would you describe your way of living/class?

W LM UM U

14. How would your parents describe their way of living/class?

W LM UM U

15. Is FL directly relevant to your work? Yes No

16. Do you expect to use FL in the future? Yes No

17. What languages have you begun to study as an adult? .....
.....

18. What languages did you study as a child?.....

19. Was foreign languages what you were 'best at' as a child? Yes No

20. If not, what do you think you were 'best at'.....

21. What qualities do you need to be good at foreign languages?
.....
.....

22. How do you feel when you start a language from scratch?
.....
.....
.....

23. Do these feelings change with time? Yes No

24. If so, how? .....
.....
.....
.....

25. Do you feel in any way different when you use a foreign language? Yes No

26. If so, how? .....
.....
.....

27. Do you think other people change in any way when they use a foreign language?
Yes No

28. If so, how?.....
.....
.....

29. What is the maximum time you have spent in foreign-language-speaking countries?
.....

30. Do you try to speak the language when you are there? Yes No

31. Do you think your fluency has changed as a result? Yes No
.....
.....

32. How do you respond to someone speaking to you in English when you are abroad?
.....
.....

33. How do you feel about exams? Pro Neutral Con

34. How do you feel about making mistakes? Important Not important
.....
.....

35. How do you feel about being corrected by the teacher? OK NOT OK
.....
.....

36. ...and by other students? OK NOT OK
.....
.....

37. Are there other people in the class who are good at languages? Yes No

38. If so, what makes them good?
.....
.....
.....

39. How do you feel when you come across a difference between your native language and the one you are learning?

.....

.....

40. How do you feel about the presence in the language class of people who are older/younger than yourself?

.....

.....

41. If you were to choose 3 words to sum up your experience of learning languages as an adult, what would they be?

a)..... b)..... c).....

Right-handed?

Age: Male/Female:

LIST OF SOURCES CONSULTED

Ahn, F., 1854. A New, Practical and Easy Method of Learning the German Language, Brockhaus, Leipzig.

Aitchison, J. 1987. Words in the Mind. Blackwell, Oxford.

Albert, M., and Obler, L., 1978. The Bilingual Brain: Neuropsychological and Neurolinguistic Aspects of Bilingualism, Academic Press, New York>, in Caplan D., 1987, Neurolinguistics and linguistic aphasiology, Cambridge, CUP.

Appel, R., and Muysken, P., 1987. Language contact and bilingualism, Edward Arnold. P14.

Argyle, M. 1983. The Psychology of Interpersonal Behaviour, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth.

Attridge, D. 1988. Unpacking the Portmanteau, or Who's afraid of Finnegan's Wake? in Culler 1988.

Bakhtin, M., 1986, Discourse in the Novel, in his The Dialogic Imagination, ed M. Holquist, University of Texas Press, Austin.

Bates, E., and Elman, J. 1996. Learning Rediscovered. Science, Vol. 274/ 13 December 1996.

Black, M. (ed.) 1962. The Importance of Language. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs.

Boni, C. 1958. Complete English-Italian Course. Allman and Son, London.

Bourne, L.F., et al. 1986. Cognitive Processes (2nd, edition). Prentice-Hall International, New Jersey.

Brown, G. 1977. Listening to spoken English, Longman, London.

Bruner, J. 1983. Child's Talk: Learning to use Language. New York, Norton.

Bruner, J. 1990. Acts of Meaning. Cambridge University Press.

Buffery, A W H. 1978. Neuropsychological aspects of language development, in Waterson and Snow, 1978,

Butterworth , B., 1980 Evidence from pauses. In B. Butterworth, (Ed.) Language Production, Vol.1., Academic Press, London

Caplan D., 1987. Neurolinguistics and linguistic aphasiology, Cambridge, CUP.

Carroll, J. B., 1956. (ed.) Language, Thought and Reality: selected writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Chomsky, N. 1965. Aspects of the theory of syntax, MIT Press, Cambridge.

Chomsky, N. 1986. Knowledge of language: its nature, origin and use. Praeger, New York.

Clark H. and Clark E., 1977. Psychology and Language, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, P49

Cole, M., Hood, L., and Macdermott, R., 1979. Ecological Niche Picking, New York, Rockefeller University Monographs. Cited in Wood, D., Aspects of Teaching and Learning, in Learning to Think, Light et al, 1991, Open University Press. (P98)

Cook, N. "Callosal inhibition: the Key to the Brain Code", in Behavioural Science 29, (1984): 98-110.)

Corder, S.P. 1974. Introducing Applied Linguistics, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth.

Culler, J (ed.), 1988. On Puns: the foundation of letters, Blackwell, Oxford.

Curtiss, S. 1977 Genie. A Psycholinguistic Study of a Modern-day Wild Child. Academic Press

Damasio, A.R. and Damasio, H., 1992. Brain and Language. Scientific American, September 1992.

Dixon, R. M. W., 1972. The Dyirbal Language of North Queensland, Cambridge University Press, London.

Edelman, G. 1992. Bright Air, Brilliant Fire. Penguin, Harmondsworth.

Edwards D., and Mercer N., 1989. Reconstructing context: the conventionalization of classroom knowledge, in Discourse Processes 12: 91-104.

Edwards J., 1985. Language, Society and Identity, Basil Blackwell, Oxford. (Page 16)

Ehrlich S.F., and Rayner, K. 1981 Contextual effects on word perception and eye movements during reading. Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behaviour, 20, 641-655.

Ehri, L.C, and Ryan, E.B. 1980. Performance of bilinguals in a picture-word interference task, Journal of Psycholinguistic Research 9, 285-302. cited in Appel and Muysken 1987.

Ellis, A.W., (Ed) 1982. Normality and Pathology in Cognitive Functions, Academic Press, London.

Ellis, A.W., 1984, Reading, Writing and Dyslexia: a Cognitive Analysis. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Ltd, London

Erikson, E. 1959. Identity And the Life Cycle. Psychological Issues, No.1, Monograph 1

Evans, C. 1988. Language People, Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press.

Fairclough, N., 1989. Language and Power. Longman.

Ferster, C.B., and Skinner, B.F., 1957. Schedules of Reinforcement. Appleton-Century-Crofts Inc., NewYork.

Fletcher, P., and Garman, M., (eds.), 1979. Language Acquisition, Cambridge, CUP.

Frager, R., and Fadiman, J., Personality and Personal Growth, Harper Collins, New York, 1984, p 377.

Freeman, W.J., 1991. The Physiology of Perception. Scientific American, February 1991.

Fries, C.C. 1945 Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.

Gardner, R.C. 1979 Social psychological aspects of second language acquisition. In Giles and Sinclair, 1979.

Garnica, O.K. 1977. Some prosodic and paralinguistic features of speech to young children, in Snow and Ferguson.(eds.).

Garret, M.F., 1982. Production of speech: Observations from normal and pathological language use. In A.W.Ellis (Ed), Normality and Pathology in Cognitive Functions, Academic Press, London

Garret, M.F., 1990. Sentence Processing, in Osherson and Lasnik 1990.

Gergen, K J., 1989. Warranting Voice and the Elaboration of the Self, in Shotter and Gergen 1989. Texts of Identity, Sage, London.

Giles, H. and St Clair, R. (eds.), 1979. Language and Social Psychology. Basil Blackwell, Oxford

Giles and Coupland, 1991, Language: Contexts and Consequences, Open University Press.

Glaser, R. 1976. Components of as psychology of instruction: toward a science of design, Review of Educational research, Vol. 46., No 1., 1-24. Cited in McDonough 1981.

Goldman-Eisler, F., 1968. Psycholinguistics: Experiments in Spontaneous Speech. Academic Press, London

Guenther, R.K., Klatsky R.L., and Putnam, W. 1980. Commonalities and differences in semantic decisions about pictures and words. Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior, 19, 54-74.

Giudice, 1944. An Italian Grammar for the Forces, Giudice, G., 1944, Printing and Stationery services CMF.

Guiora, A.Z. et al. 1972. The effects of experimentally induced changes in ego states on pronunciation ability in a second language: an exploratory study. Comprehensive Psychiatry, 15,5: 421-428.

Hakuta, K. 1976, "A case study of a Japanese child learning English as a second language", Language Learning, Vol. 26, No. 2., 321-351.

Harder, P. 1980. "Discourse as self-expression - on the reduced personality of the second language learner", in Applied Linguistics 1, 3: 262-272.

Harre, R. 1989. Language Games and Texts of Identity, 1989, in Shotter and Gergen 1989.

Harvard, J. 1961. Teaching Adults to Speak a Foreign Language, University of London Press.

Hatch, P., 1978. , Second Language Acquisition, Newbury House, Rowley, Massachusetts.

Hoffman, E. 1989. Lost in Translation, Minerva, London.

Hoffman, J.E., Nelson, B., and Hoeuk, M.R. 1983. The role of attentional resources in automatic detection. Cognitive Psychology, 15, 379-410

Horney, K. 1950 Neurosis and Human Growth, Norton New York.

Huigon, C., 1953. La Fontaine, Selected Fables, Clarendon Press, Oxford.

Huxley, A. 1940. Words and their Meanings, Ward Ritchie Press, cited in Black 1962.

James, W, 1896, The will to believe, and other essays in popular philosophy, McKay, New York and London. P232

Jaynes, J., 1993. The Origins of Consciousness and the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind. Penguin Books, Harmondsworth.

Kauffman, S.A., 1991. Antichaos and Adaptation. Scientific American, August 1991.

Kerlinger, F.N., 1969. Foundations of Behavioural Research. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York.

Kim , K.H.S., Relkin, N.R., Kyoung-Min, L., and Hirsch, J. 1997. Distinct cortical areas associated with native and second languages. Nature, Vol. 388. 10 July 1997, 171 - 174.

Kimura, D.,1973. The asymmetry of the human brain. Scientific American. 228, 70-8.

Kimura, D. 1992. Sex Differences in the Brain. Scientific American, September 1992.

Kinsbourne M and Hiscock M, 1987. Language lateralization and disordered language development, in S. Rosenberg (ed.) Advances in Applied Psycholinguistics, Vol. 1, 1987, Cambridge, CUP

Kitzinger, C., 1989. Liberal Humanism as an Ideology of Social Control: The Regulation of Lesbian Identities. In Shotter and Gergen 1989.

Klein, D, et al. 1995. The neural substrates underlying word generation: a bilingual functional-imaging study. Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci., USA 92, 2899 - 2903.

Knights, B. 1992. From Reader to Reader. Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead.

Köhler, W.1929. Gestalt Psychology, Liveright Publishing Corporation, New York.

Kolers, P., 1963. Interlingual word associations. Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behaviour, 2, 291-300

Lado, R, 1964. Language Teaching - a scientific approach. Magraw-Hill, New York.

Lakoff G, 1972. Hedges: a study in meaning criteria and the logic of fuzzy concepts. Papers of the Eighth Regional Meeting, Chicago Linguistic Society 183-228. P183.

Lakoff G, 1987. Women, fire and dangerous things: what categories reveal about the mind. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Lakoff G and Johnson M, 1980. Metaphors we live by. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Lecercle, J-J., 1990. The Violence of Language. Routledge, London and New York.

Lee, D., 1992. Competing Discourses: perspective and ideology in language. Longman, London and New York.

Lemaistre, J., 1890, French for Beginners, Williams and Norgate, London and Edinburgh.

Lennon, P., 1993. The advanced learner: affective, social and motivational factors. Language Learning Journal No. 8, 39-43.

Liberman et al 1974. Explicit Syllable and Phoneme Segmentation in the Young Child, Journal of Experimental Child Psychology, 18, 201-12.

Liebermann, P. 1998 Eire Spoke. Picador/Macmillan, London.

Light P and Perret-Clermont, A-N., 1989. Social context effects in learning and testing. In Light et al, 1991., P148.

Light, P., Sheldon, S., and Woodhead, M. (eds.), 1991. Learning to Think. Routledge, London.

Loevinger, J. 1976. Ego-Development: Conceptions and theories. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

Macnamara J. 1973: Attitudes and Learning a second language. In R. Shuy and R Fasold, (eds.) Language attitudes. Washington DC, Georgetown University Press.

Marcia, J.E., 1966. Development and Validation of Ego-Identity Status, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 3, 551-8.

Markson, L., and Bloom, P. 1997. Evidence against a dedicated system for word learning in children. Nature, Vol. 385/ 27, 813 - 5.

Matulis, A. 1977. Language - a hope: an introduction to metaglossotherapy. Detroit, National Research Institute for Psychoanalysis and Psychology.

Meara, P.,1983 Vocabulary in Second Language Specialised Bibliography 3. London, Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research

Meyer D.E., and Schvaneveldt , R.W., 1971. Facilitation in recognizing pairs of words: Evidence of a dependence between retrieval operations. Journal of Experimental Psychology, 90, 227-234.

McDonough, S.H., 1981. Psychology in Foreign Language Teaching. Allen and Unwin, London.

McShane, J., 1991. Cognitive Development: an information processing approach. Basil Blackwell, Oxford.

Miller, J., 1983, States of Mind, BBC, London.

Mitchell, D.C., 1982 The Process of Reading. J. Wiley, Chichester.

Monod, J., 1969, From Biology to Ethics. San Diego, California.

Moore T and Carling C, 1982. Understanding language: towards a post-Chomskyan linguistics. Macmillan, London.

Morea, P., 1990. Personality - an introduction to the theories of psychology. Penguin, Harmondsworth.

Myles, F. 1995. Interaction between linguistic theory and language processing, in Second Language Research, Vol. 11, No. 3.

Näätänen, R.; Lehtokoski, A; Lennes, M; Cheour, M; Huotilaenen, M; Livonen, A; Vainio, M; Alku, P; Ilmoniemi, R.J; Luuk, A; Allik, J; Sinkkonen, J; and Alho, K. 1997. Language-specific phoneme representations revealed by electric and magnetic brain responses. Nature, Vol. 385/ 30 January 1997. 432 - 4.

Nebrija, E.A., 1495. Vocabulario Español-Latino, Salamanca.

Obler, L., et al. 1982. Cerebral Lateralization in Bilinguals: Methodological Issues, Brain and Language 15, 40-54.

Ong, W.J., 1982. Orality and Literacy. Methuen, London and New York.

Ortony, A., (ed) 1979. Metaphor and thought. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Osherson, D.N and Lasnik, H, 1990. Invitation to Cognitive Science, MIT.

Paradis, M., 1981. Neurolinguistic organization of a bilingual's two languages, The Seventh LACUS Forum 1980 (Columbia) 480-94.

Parmée, D., 1971. Twelve French Poets, Longman.
Perry, R.B., The Thought and Character of William James, 1935, II, P479, Little and Brown, Boston.

Phillips, E.M. and Pugh, D.S. 1987. How to get a Ph.D - a handbook for students and their supervisors. Open University, Milton Keynes.

Pinker, S. 1984. Language Learnability and Language Development, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA..

Pinker, S. 1990. Language acquisition, in Osherson and Lasnik, 1990.

Pinker, S. 1994. The Language Instinct. Allen Lane.

Polanyi, M. 1969. Knowing and Being, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.

Reddy M J 1979. The conduit metaphor - a case frame conflict in our language about language. In Ortony 1979, pp 284-324.

Rendall, H. 1998, Only connect. Netword, Issue No 23.

Richards, J.C. 1971. A non-contrastive approach to error analysis. English Language Teaching, Vol 25. No 3., pp 204-19.

Rock, I., and Palmer, S., 1990. The Legacy of Gestalt Psychology. Scientific American, December 1990.

Rogers, Alan, 1986. Teaching Adults. Open University Press.

Rogoff, B., Gauvain, M., and Ellis S., 1991. Development viewed in its cultural context, in Light et al, 1991, P300.

Rosenburg, S. 1987. Advances in Applied Psycholinguistics, Vol. 1., Cambridge, C.U.P.

Ross, P.E., 1991. Hard Words. Scientific American, April 1991.

Sampson, E. E. 1989. The Deconstruction of the Self, in Shotter J and Gergen K.J., Texts of Identity, Sage, London

Saussure, F. 1974. Course in General Linguistics. First published in 1916. Fontana, London.

Schneider, W., and Fisk, A.D., 1982. Concurrent automatic and controlled visual research: can processing occur without resource cost? Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory and Cognition, 8, 261-279

Schneider, W., and Shiffrin R.M. (1977) Controlled and automatic information processing.1. Detection, search and attention. Psychological Review, 84, 1-66

Segalowitz, N. 1977. Psychological perspectives on bilingual education, in Spolsky, B., and Cooper R.L.,(eds) 1977.

Seidenberg, M. S. 1997. Language Acquisition and Use: Learning and Applying Probabilistic Constraints. Science, Vol. 275/ 14 March 1997. PP 1599 - 1603.

Selcoe, D.J., 1992. Aging Brain, Aging Mind. Scientific American, September 1992.

Selinker, L., 1972. Interlanguage, International Review of Applied Linguistics, Vol 10, No3, PP 201-31.

Selinker, L., 1992. Rediscovering Interlanguage. Longman, Harlow, 1992.

Shiffrin R.M., and Schneider W. (1977) Controlled and automatic information processing 11. Perceptual learning, automatic attending , and a general theory. Psychological Review, 84, 127-190

Shotter, J., 1989. Social Accountability and the Social Construction of "You", in Shotter and Gergen 1989, P141.

Shotter, J and Gergen K.J., 1989. Texts of Identity, Sage, London

Shuy R., and Fasold R. (eds) 1973. Language attitudes. Washington DC, Georgetown University Press.

Skinner, B.F., 1938. The Behaviour of Organisms. Appleton-Century-Crofts Inc., NewYork.

Skutnabb-Kangas, T., 1983. Bilingualism or not: The education of minorities. Clevedon.)

Slobin, D.I., 1982. Universal and Particular in the Acquisition of Language. In Wanner and Gleitman, 1982.

Slugowski B.R. and Ginsburg G.P. 1989. Ego Identity and Explanatory Speech. In Shotter and Gergen 1989.

Smyth, M.M., Morris, P.E., Levy, P., and Ellis, A.W., 1990. Cognition in Action, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Ltd, London

Snow, C.E., and Ferguson, C.F.(eds), 1977. Talking to Children, Cambridge, CUP

Spolsky, B., and Cooper R.L.,(eds) 1977. Frontiers of bilingual education, Rowley, Mass.

Stanovich, K.E., 1980, Toward an interactive compensatory model of individual differences in thedevelopment of reading fluency. Reading Research Quarterly, 16, 32-71

Stanovich K.E., and West R.F.,(1979) Mechanisms of sentence context effects in reading: Automatic activation and conscious attention. Memory and Cognition, 7, 77-85

Steinberg, J., 1976. Why Switzerland? Cambridge University Press.

Steiner, G., 1975. After Babel: Aspects of language and translation. London, OUP.

Stones, E. 1966. An Introduction to Educational Psychology. Methuen.

Stroop, J.R. 1935. Studies of interference in serial verbal reactions. Journal of Experimental Psychology, 18, 643-61.

Tanburn, N. P., 1963. Private Languages Again. Mind LXXII.

Tight, M., 1983. Opportunities for Adult Education, London, Croom Helm and Open University.

Tobin, Y., 1990. Semiotics and Linguistics. Longman.

Tulving, E. 1972. Episodic and semantic memory, in E. Tulving and W. Donaldson (eds) Organisation of Memory. Academic Press, New York.

Vernon P.E., 1963. Personality Assessment - A Critical Survey, Methuen, London.

Vygotsky, L.S., 1987. The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky, Vol. 1. Problems of General Psychology. Rieber, R.W., and Carton, A.S., (eds), Plenum Press, New York.

Wanner E. and Gleitman I.R. (eds), 1982. Language acquisition: the state of the art. Cambridge University Press.

Waterson N. and Snow C, 1978. The development of communication, Chichester; John Wiley and Sons.

Watts, M.K. 1991. Unpublished M.A. thesis, Durham University.

Watts, M.K. 1997. Report on BBC Languages Website, commissioned by the BBC.

Weatherall M and Potter J., 1989. Narrative Characters and Accounting for Violence, In Shotter and Gergen 1989.

Weinreich, U., 1953. Languages in contact: findings and problems. The Hague

Weiss, J., 1990. Unconscious Mental Functioning. Scientific American, March 1990.

Wells, G. 1979. Variation in child Language, in Fletcher and Garman, 1979.

Whorf, B. L., 1956. Language, Thought and Reality: Selected writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf. ed. John B. Carroll, Cambridge, Massachussetts.

Winnicott, D.W., 1971. Playing and Reality. Tavistock.

Wood, D., 1991. Aspects of Teaching and Learning, in Learning to Think, Light et al, Open University Press.

Yogananda, P., 1968. Spiritual Diary, Self-Realization Fellowship, Los Angeles.

Yule, G., 1985. The Study of Language. Cambridge University Press.